

On the
Eastern
front

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PAGE 3

The New Dark Ages

Will worldwide
fundamentalism
shatter the
Enlightenment?

Diana Johnstone

PAGE 10

c 1989 Miles DeCoster



President Carlos Andres Perez

Debt bomb explodes in 'rich' Venezuela

By Merrill Collett

CARACAS

After the dead were buried and the broken glass had been swept off the streets of a dozen cities, Venezuela was still trying to size up the damage done by three days of national riots against the government's economic austerity program. The riots, which left at least 250 dead and thousands injured, were sparked by government mandated gasoline price hikes on February 26 that caused bus owners to double their fares on the next morning. Furious passengers responded by barricading streets and burning buses. The protesters then turned to looting stores. A wave of uncontrolled violence rolled over Venezuela from the Andes to the Amazon Basin.

How could South America's most stable democracy dissolve into anarchy overnight? Latin America lives on a volcano of popular discontent heated red hot by the re-

gion's debt crisis. The fact that the volcano exploded in oil-rich Venezuela says just how bad things have become. Adding to the irony is the fact that the country's current president, 66-year-old Carlos Andres Perez, is so well-liked that voters just re-elected him by a wide margin after 10 years out of office.

Perez is a social democrat, and poor and working-class Venezuelans have fond memories of his first term, from 1974 to 1979. Those were the "good old days" of high prices for petroleum. In just one year \$10 billion in windfall oil profits dropped into government coffers. CAP, as Perez is known in Venezuela, ran a free-spending regime that built pharaonic aluminum and steel plants, imposed new controls on foreign investment and launched expensive social welfare programs.

How times have changed: World prices for oil, which provides 87 percent of Venezuela's hard currency, have been in decline for years. But in 1986 they dropped sharply just as former President Jaime Lusinchi opted to increase government spending to keep his popularity high. The result was a \$3 billion drop in the Central Bank's foreign exchange reserves in the last two years.

Trapped between the hammer of low oil prices and the anvil of Venezuela's \$35 billion foreign debt, Perez has turned in an unexpected direction for escape. Re-elected as a left-leaning populist who opposed "the economic totalitarianism of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)," Perez promptly set out to meet the hard times with an IMF-style austerity program.

Even as looters were tearing into stores in a dozen Venezuelan cities, Central Bank President Pedro Tinoco and Finance Minister Eglee Iturbe de Blanco were in Washington to sign an IMF economic adjustment program. Under the terms of the agreement, the IMF will loan Venezuela \$4.7 billion over the next three years and the Venezuelan government will increase charges for public services, raise bank interest rates, eliminate foreign exchange controls and cut public spending.

Even the most optimistic economists say the plan will produce a devaluation of at least 75 percent, but some are predicting a much sharper drop. In any case the falling value of the *bolivar* is bound to push up the rate of inflation. Estimates range from a 40 to a 90 percent rise this year—historic highs for Venezuela. Venezuelans are worried.

Living on the edge: The poor and working-class Venezuelans who did most of the looting share with the rest of the country the problem of holding their own against rising inflation and falling wages. But the residents of the squatter settlements that ring all the cities in the country have far fewer resources to balance against the shock of economic adjustment. The receding wave of oil affluence has left stranded on the hills of Caracas some 2 million squatters struggling to survive in what are called "marginal zones." Living conditions vary from zone to zone. In old, established communities like Petare, which overlooks the valley's eastern end, decades of civic action has pushed the government to provide minimal social services. In others, such as New Tacagua, residents perch on treeless hillsides without garbage collection, health care, telephones, reliable electricity or plumbing. They have to defecate in childrens' potties and fling the contents down the hill. But wherever they live, the squatters live outside legitimate society. And they resent it.

"They call us the 'marginal ones,'" said Petare resident Hector Garcia. "But we aren't the corrupt politicians or the business speculators."

The enduring nightmare of the Venezuelan middle class was that resentful *marginados* would come down from the hills. Two weeks ago it happened.

"When we heard that the students were protesting in Caracas and the freeway was blocked, we decided to take action," said Jose Ramon Diaz, a 38-year-old resident of the barrio of Antimano.

The action Diaz and the other Antimano residents took was against the blue and white Ronco pasta factory, which butts up against one of the hills on which Antimano is built. "The people took over," said Diaz. "We disarmed the guards and went in. There was no army or police to stop us."

They weren't sure they would find food inside. In the days prior to the riots, pasta, a basic element in the Venezuelan diet, had disappeared from the shelves of grocery

stores. Rumors held that pasta-makers were hoarding their products to pressure the government to grant price hikes. Diaz and the others found evidence that the rumors were true.

"When we went in, we found tons of pasta, even though there hasn't been any in the stores," he said.

The community streamed through the smashed factory gates and stocked up. "It was a family affair," said Diaz. There were men, women, children. Even disabled people took part. "We loaded up their wheel chairs with pasta," Diaz said.

Similar scenes were repeated hundreds of times across the country. When the looting continued for a second day the government called out the army, but even army tanks couldn't stop the poor from laying waste to businesses. The sacking of Venezuela was systematic and often joyful. For three days everything was free. In the Anaco Shopping Center in the Caracas district of San Bernardino, smiling TV reporters followed hundreds of people as they casually wheeled off shopping carts full of goods "purchased" with a 100 percent discount.

Out of control: But the big street party was also a dance of death. Police and soldiers battled looters, some of them armed. Snipers opened fire from public housing projects in poor districts. If the looters were uncontrolled, so were the security forces. Some, especially army soldiers, allowed looting to continue under their noses. Others, particularly the Metropolitan Police, opened fire directly into crowds. Death was random and rapid.

Fifteen-year-old Jose Luis Naranjo and members of his "Los Futuros" baseball team were crossing Lecuna Avenue in Caracas on February 28 when looting broke out nearby and a private security guard opened fire, according to a newspaper report. Jose Luis fell dead, one of 10 to 15 children reported killed. The dead and wounded jammed the hospitals. Doctors issued an urgent call for blood. By that afternoon the government had declared martial law

INSIDE STORY

and imposed a 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew.

That, and 10,000 troops airlifted into Caracas on March 1, reasserted government control. By the next day the convulsion was over. Caraqueños woke up to long lines everywhere: at the few undamaged grocery stores that dared to open, at gas stations, at pharmacies and at the municipal morgue, where family members looked for their missing loved ones.

The official toll for all deaths in the riots is 250, but medical sources say the actual number is at least twice as high. In poor barrios, people say they are saddened by the deaths, but they are proud of what they did.

"It's too bad that it took the deaths to do it," said Rosa Herrera, a 42-year-old mother of nine and a resident of the sprawling squatter settlement of Petare. "But at least now the government is afraid of us," she said with a small smile.

If the number of casualties may never be known, it is also difficult to calculate the political damage. *Turba*, the Spanish word for mob, has entered into popular discourse for the first time in memory. Observers wonder if *turba* spells trouble for Venezuelan democracy. If so, the problems will come far down the road. At this point there is no threat from the extreme left. The revolutionary movement was thoroughly discredited in the '60s, when it opted for armed struggle against democratic elections. Nor is there a danger of military coup. As Defense Minister Italo del Valle Alliegro said on March 1, the Venezuelan armed forces are "structurally democratic."

The riots, and the martial law that followed, jolted Venezuelans with unpleasant memories of the military regimes that have ruled the country for most of this century. But Venezuela's democracy is not in danger, at least not for now.

Merrill Collett is *In These Times'* correspondent in Venezuela.

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By David Moberg

WITH ITS STUNNING SUCCESS IN THE first week of the Eastern Airlines strike, the labor movement rediscovered the power of its oldest weapon: solidarity.

In an unprecedented display of unity among unions in the airline industry, pilots and flight attendants overwhelmingly respected the picket lines established by mechanics and ramp-service employees who were prompted to strike by the wage-cuts demands of Frank Lorenzo, chairman of Eastern's parent, Texas Air. Many laid-off, non-union Eastern workers joined the picket lines established by the International Association of Machinists (IAM), and in the wings Teamsters, rail workers and workers on other airlines were ready to take action to support the strikers.

The strike's power was quickly evident. With only 4 percent of its flights in the air, and losing \$4 million a day, Eastern declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy on March 9. "We almost look forward to bankruptcy," IAM spokesman Wally Haber said. "We think we'll get a better shake from a judge than from Lorenzo."

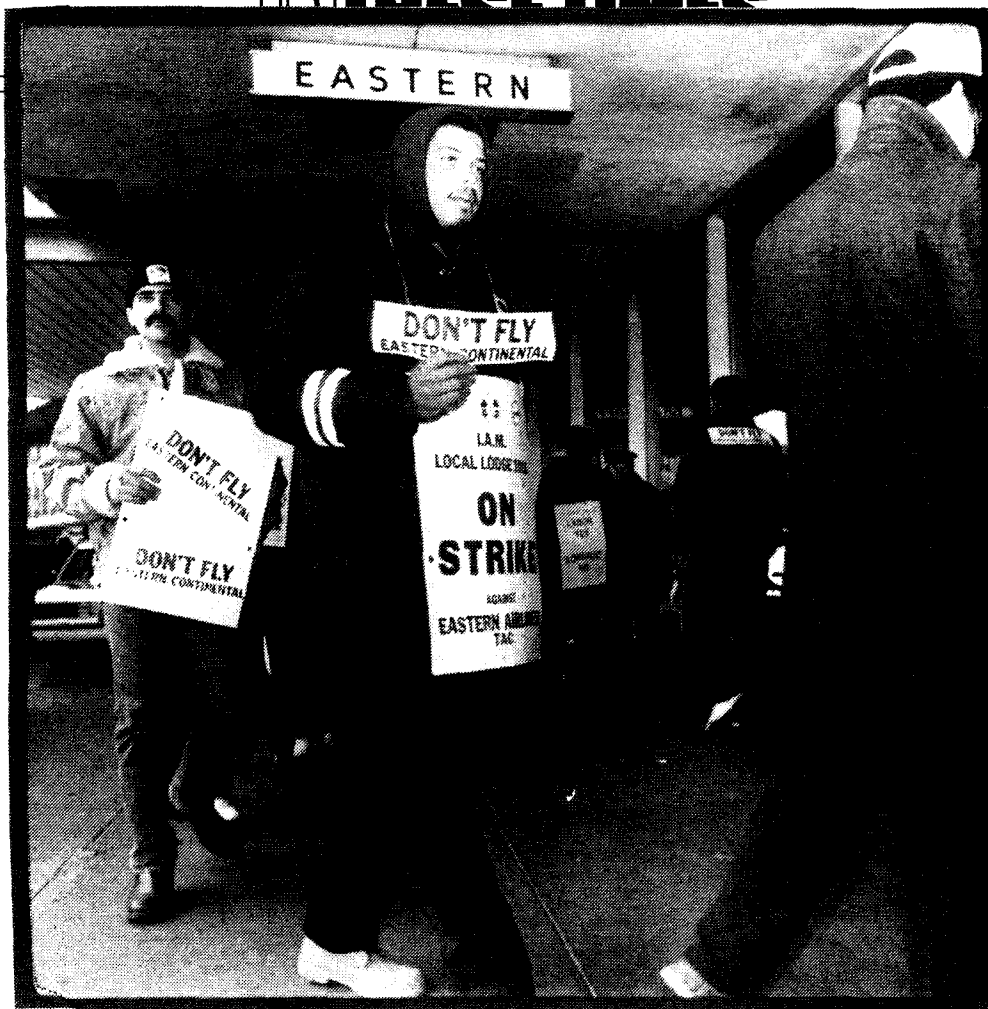
Lorenzo's financial vampire: The Eastern strike is a watershed for organized labor. Lorenzo epitomizes in a crude fashion a popular management strategy. He is not just a union-buster who ruthlessly cuts workers' pay and undermines working conditions, but he also shuffles corporate assets in clever and complex schemes to maximize pressure on employees.

Starting with tiny Texas Air, Lorenzo has built an empire representing one-fifth of the U.S. airline industry. After taking over Continental in the early '80s, he demanded labor concessions, then took the company into bankruptcy and abrogated all union contracts. Since buying Eastern in 1986 Lorenzo has mounted a relentless attack on employees and the airline's own assets.

Stopping Lorenzo's assault thus becomes important not only for Eastern's machinist, pilot and flight attendant unions, all of whose contracts have expired, but also for all airline workers and unions in general.

With George Bush's refusal to invoke a presidential emergency fact-finding board, as requested by the IAM and opposed by Lorenzo, the conflict became political as well, just like the air controllers strike early in Ronald Reagan's tenure. Reeling from the John Tower controversy, the White House—where a former Texas Air vice president is the top assistant for legislative affairs—clearly saw fighting the unions as a way to appear in command. But when Transportation Secretary Sam Skinner angrily rebuked Lorenzo last week for failing to understand Eastern employees, it suggested that the Bush administration felt snookered: having backed Lorenzo, it found itself on the losing side. Unlike the air traffic controllers' strike, organized labor was ready, and AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland emphasized that this was not an intra-company dispute but a conflict between labor and corporate America.

Wages have been generally stabilizing in the airline industry, and a labor victory at Eastern would reinforce that trend. But more important, it would give labor a psychological and political boost. Demonstrating the



Eastern employees walk the picket lines at New York's LaGuardia Airport.

Eastern strike could help labor movement take off

power of solidarity would encourage other unions to link efforts in future disputes. Labor's struggle at Eastern also demonstrates the importance—and the difficulty—of combatting management strategies of capital deployment in addition to bargaining or traditional contract concerns.

Blaming the blameworthy: The Eastern strike could represent a turning point—a shift in the public's perception of who's the real culprit at troubled companies. Management failures, not workers' wages, have often prompted conflicts involving worker concessions. But labor has rarely succeeded—and not often even tried—to pin the blame on management. At Eastern unions can claim to represent not only their own interests but also the company's and the public's need for reliable, safe, good-quality service. For once workers—even well-paid workers—are coming off as the good guys, even while on strike. The union has continually proposed mediation, even binding arbitration, of the dispute. That strategy makes labor appear to be the reasonable party in the dispute, although it risks an unfavorable arbitrator's settlement.

Although Eastern machinists have opposed concessions, they have in the past accepted stock in the company in exchange for wage cuts and saved the airline more than \$137 million with suggestions for better operations. When former Eastern Chairman Frank Borman scuttled the union's efforts at cooperation, the IAM tried unsuccessfully to buy the airline and dump Borman. But in 1986 Eastern's board of directors accepted Frank Lorenzo's inferior bid—after paying Lorenzo a non-refundable \$20 million simply to make an offer and giving Borman a \$10 million golden parachute. Besides paying far less than what many regarded as Eastern's

fair market value, Lorenzo got Eastern to finance more than half his takeover payment.

Ever since, Lorenzo has been trying to slash wages and break their unions, much as he did by taking Continental Airlines into bankruptcy in 1983. Now Lorenzo wants an average 28 percent wage cut for mechanics and ramp-service employees, with far deeper cuts for future workers. The IAM has offered a one-year wage freeze, work-rule changes and a lowered starting rate with modest wage increases in later years.

Fly-by-night operator: In order to keep deeply troubled Continental aloft and increase pressure on Eastern employees, Lorenzo began stripping Eastern's valuable assets, shrinking the airline by 30 percent (thus increasing the burden of fixed costs). He shifted airplanes, routes and gates to Continental, and loaned \$40 million of Eastern's money to Continental. He transferred Eastern's valuable reservation system to Continental at far less—perhaps one-fifth—of its market value, paying for it with a low-interest note due in 25 years. Then he turned around and charged Eastern \$120 million a year for a service that had been earning the airline a profit. Eastern pays cash to Continental, but receives largely unpaid IOUs for its assets.

Lorenzo also sold Eastern's most profitable division, the New York shuttle, to Donald Trump, despite a court battle by the machinists that was scuttled by the rulings of three Reagan-appointed judges. That \$365 million deal is now on hold due to the strike.

While carrying on a 17-month battle to win \$150 million in concessions from the IAM, Lorenzo has reportedly spent \$70 million in strike preparations, including shuffling tens of millions to Continental for standby scab pilots.

The list of Lorenzo's abuses goes on—pro-

viding a lesson in creative accounting that rivals some of the great financial scams of all time. But the basic strategy is clear: Lorenzo is bleeding and shrinking Eastern, deliberately creating huge losses to prop up Continental and to break Eastern's unions.

Lorenzo insists he needs lower wages and no union restrictions to "save" Eastern, but Eastern's wages are in the low-to-middle range among U.S. airlines, and competitors paying more are making healthy profits. Even more telling, Lorenzo lost more money in

TRANSPORTATION

the last two years at Continental than he did at Eastern, even though the slightly smaller Continental has the lowest wages in the industry, no unions and enjoys continual subsidy of infusions from already-drained Eastern. Meanwhile, Lorenzo and a few friends own a holding company, Jet Capital Corp., that controls the Texas Air empire and siphons off lucrative management fees from its debt-ridden subsidiaries.

"Wage rates are not bringing Eastern and Continental down," said IAM spokesman Haber. "Mr. Lorenzo, the robber baron, is bringing Eastern and Continental down. He's doing very well with Jet Capital. If we gave him everything he wanted, he'd still lose \$200 million a year [on Eastern]. There's no point in giving concessions to a man who can't run an airline."

A different kind of mandate: The IAM hoped that Bush would be forced to enter the fray—either because of congressional action or a national transportation emergency, such as legal secondary picketing of commuter rail lines. The union wanted the president to appoint an emergency board, which would end the strike for 60 days while the panel investigated and presented a non-binding proposal for settlement. Such emergency boards were once regularly appointed, but have been used only once since 1966. Then-Secretary of Labor George Shultz abandoned the emergency-boards policy in 1969.

The unions don't expect Lorenzo to settle. They think that, in the aftermath of the bankruptcy, he will try to sell Eastern—in parts or as an entity. Last week Eastern sold some of its lines to U.S. Air, and the bankruptcy filing may be the first step toward further sales. Eastern Chairman Phil Bakes said a reorganized Eastern would be smaller. He also threatened to hire new pilots to get Eastern flying if he could not win a back-to-work agreement with the pilots.

The unions ultimately hope that someone else, even the unions themselves if necessary, will buy Eastern. "I'd love to see him sell this airline to another viable airline," Eastern pilot spokesman Dan Ashby said. "Whoever would take the chance would find he'd have the most motivated professional employees in the industry." But some possible buyers, like TWA Chairman Carl Icahn, are hardly good news for unions.

Meanwhile, the machinists see Continental as key to the battle. If picketing, boycotts and other pressure on Continental can cut passenger loads, Lorenzo won't be able to dump Eastern and shift its routes and passengers to Continental. Lorenzo was defeated in the first round, when Eastern pilots refused to cross picket lines, but he will not give up easily. Inevitably, the conflict will spread—and labor seems prepared to raise the stakes as necessary. □

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INSHORT

By Joel Bleifuss

The greenback effect

Q: What does a corporation get when it underwrites a public TV program? A: Good PR. Take Du Pont, maker of many chemicals and the "exclusive underwriter" of the popular science program *Newton's Apple*. Du Pont pays the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) Minneapolis affiliate, KTCA, \$700,000 each year to produce the show. Q: And how will *Newton's Apple* explain the greenhouse effect in a program due to air next fall? A: Very carefully. Du Pont makes 25 percent of the world's ozone-eating chlorofluorocarbons (see *In These Times*, Aug. 17, 1988). A source at PBS says producers of *Newton's Apple* must maintain a delicate balance. Du Pont doesn't want it to appear that its financial support, which accounts for 75 percent of the show's funding, has influenced the program's content. And the show's producers don't want to do anything to jeopardize their funding base. The result is sometimes tepid coverage of environmental issues. "It's a system-wide problem," says the source. "If you want to maintain your funding you have to be extremely sensitive about keeping the corporate underwriter happy."

Our man in Seoul

When Ronald Reagan appointed James R. Lilley as ambassador to South Korea in 1986, some Koreans worried that Lilley, the former CIA station chief in China, would perhaps come on the job wearing two hats. Now many South Koreans are similarly alarmed at George Bush's selection of Donald Gregg as their next U.S. ambassador. Gregg, who has spent most of his adult life in the CIA, is no stranger to East Asia. Beginning in 1951, he worked for the agency in China, then Japan, Burma, Vietnam and finally South Korea, where he served as CIA station chief between 1973 and 1976. More recently, Gregg has been linked to the 1980 Reagan-Bush campaign's alleged arms-for-hostages deal with representatives of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini (see *In These Times* June 24, 1987 and Oct. 12, 1988). In 1982 Gregg became then-Vice President Bush's national security adviser, a position from which he helped the North network provide unauthorized aid to the contras. An editorial in the Seoul newspaper *Chosun Ilbo* observed: "In expressing their general impression of the designation of Gregg, Koreans would only like to ask: 'Why a former CIA man again?' ... People familiar with Korea should know that Koreans are sensitive to the appearance and structure of things. Many Koreans tend to think that who the U.S. picks as its ambassador is indicative of how the U.S. will treat Korea. It is not our intention to question Gregg's personality or abilities. We only worry that consecutively appointing former CIA men as ambassadors may give Koreans cause to think their country is regarded not as an object of diplomacy but as an object of intelligence or strategy."

Scales of justice

U.S. District Judge Joseph E. Stevens Jr. of Kansas City has given new meaning to "equal justice under the law." On February 15 Stevens ordered convicted drug dealer Johnnie R. Neil to spend 28 months in prison, less than half of the 63-month minimum term called for by new federal sentencing recommendations. Neil, a 33-year-old car salesman, had been convicted of selling a quarter-ounce of cocaine to an undercover police agent and then, three days later, buying three pounds of cocaine from the same agent. Judge Stevens explained that he departed from federal guidelines because Neil had spent 11 years in the military, had a stable family life and had done substantial volunteer work with local young people. That same day Stevens sentenced Dorothy Jane Eber, 37, to 26 months in prison for trespassing last August on a Minuteman II missile silo in southwest Missouri. Twenty-four months of that sentence are for trespassing. The other two are for contempt of court. Eber refused to answer the judge's questions during the trial. "You are neither a heroine or martyr. You are a lawbreaker pure and simple," Stevens told Eber, a 61-year-old grandmother of 11.

Save the family

Former Colorado Gov. Dick Lamm believes that "demography is destiny." Speaking at a Denver Rotary Club luncheon earlier this year, Lamm warned that the 2 million aliens who have recently been admitted to this country run the danger of forming "a



Irene Tatars



Irene Tatars

At the School of the Art Institute of Chicago the men in blue have been out in force containing disorder and preventing the red-white-and-blue from being trampled on. The flap centers on a flag-as-artwork, "What Is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag," that is part of a minority student art show. The Art Institute, in an attempt to contain the controversy, has prohibited the show from being photographed. The photo of the exhibit shown here was taken from under a coat when the photographer's accomplice diverted the officer on guard.

Art for the international proletarian revolution's sake

CHICAGO—For the past few weeks defenders of the Stars and Stripes have been massing on the Art Institute of Chicago to protest "What Is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?," a controversial art work displayed in the museum's student gallery.

The installation consists of a three-by-five-foot flag draped on the floor and a set of notebooks in which viewers can write answers to the artist's question. To write comfortably, it is necessary to stand on the flag and thus violate federal and state laws. Above the notebooks are photographs of a flag-draped coffin and Korean protesters burning a U.S. flag while carrying "Yankee Go Home" signs.

Oh, it's art, all right. But it's also politics. "Dread" Scott Tyler (he usually wears dreadlocks) is the piece's creator and a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Above all, though, he's a supporter of the Revolutionary Communist Party USA (RCP), a group whose members seem to have a propensity for treading on flag-desecration statutes.

Another RCP devotee, Gregory Lee Johnson, was convicted under Texas law after a U.S. flag was burned at a demonstration during the 1984 Republican National Convention in Dallas. His attorney, William Kunstler, will present Johnson's

case to the Supreme Court next week.

Tyler explains: "As a revolutionary and a proletarian internationalist, I, along with many others, welcome the targeting and torching of this symbol." Tyler denies rumors that his art is part of an RCP public-relations campaign, though he admits, "I knew about the case before I did the piece." For his part, Johnson is aiding his comrade with the written statement: "Attacks on Dread Scott and the U.S. Supremacist Court's attack on myself present a chance for many people in this country to see how hundreds of millions of people in the world see the American flag as a symbol of oppression...."

But whether any Communist flag plot exists, the Supreme Court's decision in the Johnson case may determine the enforceability of flag-desecration laws and set limits on how artists and political protesters may use the flag. Though Johnson's involvement in flag burning was purely political, a group of artists—including Leon Golub, Jasper Johns, Faith Ringgold and Claes Oldenburg—have filed a friend-of-the-court brief arguing that laws against flag desecration eliminate "tools of the trade" and force artists to "censor their own work."

But artist Tyler is anything but a First Amendment purist. Last May he argued for the removal of another controversial student work, a painting that depicted late Chicago Mayor Harold Washington in women's underwear.

How the flag laws apply to Tyler's work has been confusing. After a coalition of veterans' groups filed suit in local court to have the flag picked up off the floor, Cook County Circuit Court Judge Kenneth Gillis ruled that no laws had been broken. Yet Chicago police, who with their constant presence since the onset of the protests have become part of the piece, promised to arrest anyone who trampled the flag. Sure enough, on March 4, tourist Suzy Willhoft, a Virginia school teacher, stepped on the flag. She was arrested, interrogated for five hours and charged. If convicted she faces up to three years in prison.

"What Is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?" is part of a minority student show that ran without incident from its February 17 opening until February 23, when, under mysterious circumstances, veterans' group were alerted and the ever-escalating protests began. At times when emotions begin to run high, school officials close the exhibit, like when Illinois Republican state Sen. Walter Dudy, a Vietnam veteran, picked the flag off the floor and, with a prayer, began folding it.

Student opinion at the School of the Art Institute is heavily in favor of letting Tyler's piece lie, but the artist says he is disappointed with the lack of revolutionary fervor. He wishes debate would focus less on the First Amendment and more on "reactionary attempts to enforce patriotism."

And, yes, the piece is for sale. \$275.

—Denise Rinaldo

Egypt confronts the rising crescent of Islamic fundamentalism

CAIRO, EGYPT—Driving through town late one evening, a taxi was stopped by a police roadblock at one of the bridges spanning the Nile. After a brief look inside, the officer waved the taxi on. One of the passengers, a Palestinian living in Cairo, explained that such roadblocks are common. The police are looking for members of radical Moslem fundamentalist groups.

These groups, growing fast and far more militant than the more-established Moslem Brotherhood, have had several deadly run-ins with the police in Cairo's crowded Shubra area and the tenement suburb of Ein Shams.

Though Egypt remains presumably the most secular of the Arab states, the country is being profoundly influenced by an ever-spreading wave of Islamic fundamentalism. Not all of the fundamentalist groups are violent or fanatic. And fundamentalism is not only striking the rural and urban masses, whose lives have become more difficult in recent years, but also the urban middle class, university students and pro-

fessionals.

In the early '70s, President Anwar Sadat tried to counter leftist activity at universities by encouraging fundamentalist groups to spread their word. Today, Islamic groups dominate the student elections. And these groups provide student services, like discounted rates on books. Fundamentalists have also taken control of several important professional organizations for doctors, lawyers and engineers.

"The Egypt of the '80s is more conservative," Ali Dessouki, director of Cairo University's Center for Political Studies, told *In These Times*, "and Islamic fundamentalism has proved to be the main vehicle for the expression of this conservatism." An Egyptian official, who asked to remain anonymous, put it this way: "The mood of the masses is religious. If you want to keep contact with the masses, you have to speak the language they understand."

The fundamentalist groups know how to do that, cultivating the fertile ground of Egypt's current socio-economic conditions. The country's population grows by 1 million every 10 months. Over 50 percent of Egyptians are illiterate. Jobs are hard to come by. Inflation is rising. Corruption runs rampant.

Many Egyptians have given up on both socialism, which they equate

with late President Gamal Abdel Nasser's failed statist policies, and capitalism, whose ugly incarnation as Sadat's Open Door Policy they hold responsible for Egypt's present economic plight. In their disillusionment, Egyptians turn to Islamic fundamentalism as a way out of their misery. "The fundamentalists don't offer a specific solution to the problems plaguing Egypt," said the official. "They peddle a different Egypt: follow God and these problems will find their own solutions."

Nevertheless, a wide network of Islamic self-help institutions has sprung up, challenging the inefficiency of government services. Thousands of fundamentalist-operated medical clinics and schools provide services for the poor that outshine decaying government facilities.

The government of President Hosni Mubarak has responded with a two-track policy: on the one hand, the repression of Islamic extremists, on the other, cooptation of more moderate fundamentalist groups like the Moslem Brotherhood and appropriation of Islamic symbols.

But there is no doubt that the traditional hold on power by Egypt's political class—an exclusive, Westernized urban elite—is becoming more precarious.

—Reto Pieth

Courtroom drama turns to soap

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Now three weeks old, the Oliver North trial is anything but a political show. With the conspiracy charges dropped as untriable, North now stands in the dock accused of lying and thievery. In a low-key fashion the independent counsel makes the broader point, depicting North's actions as an affront to the system. But it's like going after Al Capone for tax evasion.

North's defense responds with some of that good old-time religion. "What you did not hear in the government's case was that the Soviet Union had come to Nicaragua," says Brendan Sullivan, North's lawyer and adjunct professor of political history at the federal district court. His audience is comprised of the 17 jurors and alternates whose ostrich-like attention to current events has been well-ridiculed. It is their good fortune that counsel has prepared a crash course in the Red menace. Justifying Ollie's efforts, Sullivan pulls out the familiar stops—the "great land mass of Russia," those ever-vulnerable Caribbean sea lanes, Nicaragua—that "little yellow country" on the map just down the road from Harlingen, Texas. Sullivan's had two years to consider his opening statement, but he presents a thesis so uninspired it must strike even these beginning pupils as passé. In the toasty courtroom, one of them does seem to nod off halfway through the three-hour effort.

Indeed, this cold blast from the past is stale. Even Sullivan can't be

bothered to refine elementary distinctions: "The president was outraged that if Nicaragua fell to the communists—as it was under the Sandinistas...."

"But Professor Sullivan," one wishes to call out, "had it 'fallen' or not?" Bespectacled and trim, with a shock of white hair cultivated from so much fretting, Sullivan touches the button on his suit coat, but provides no answer. Gliding over fact and history like a speed skater, he argues that this former lieutenant colonel who is accused of lying to Congress was only following orders. It's the Nazi defense.

Two weeks into the government's case, the jurors have heard little but superlatives for the contras from the likes of Adolpho Calero, Robert Owen, John Singlaub. The strongest critic has been the former chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-IN), to whose face North repeatedly lied about his support for the contras.

Of course, not all observers in the cramped courtroom fantasize about unleashing a defiant scream. Former Rep. Hamilton Fish the elder, 100 years old, shows up one day with his walker to shake Ollie's hand. "I wish we could put you on the stand," says the defendant. "I don't know about that," Fish replies with a dismissive gesture, referring, it seems, to the whole Iran-contra mess. "All I know is we can't stand another communist government."

There are some neo-nutsos, too, including a stern fiftyish fundamentalist from Maryland, clad in black. What does she think of the trial? She

takes out a North-for-hero button and shoves it in this reporter's ear. It plays an electronic version of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." What does that mean? Eyes sharpened, lips pursed, she glares and replies, "What does it mean to you?" Her neighbor, a frail and frightened older woman, brushes back her disheveled gray hair and says with a smile, "Tell me your name so if I see your article I can burn it."

Daily disputes over the use of classified documents make it a poor bet the jury will ever get to decide this case. They also make it less likely that Sullivan will be able to pull the ultimate trump: a direct link between Ollie and Ronald Reagan. But while that would surely rouse the 60-odd journalists crammed in the back, it might not matter to the jurors. That connection may seem direct enough—closer, in fact, than Sullivan could hope. For while tying Reagan to what North did, he's also playing up the distance in that relationship. Then-National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane was only "a hundred steps" from RR's office, says Sullivan, but North was all the way across the street, in a separate building. The lieutenant colonel, in short, was not part of the elite, just a common patriot, a regular worker. The Nuremberg defense is also a class argument. Sullivan fought hard to get a jury "untainted" by prior knowledge of North. But in the end, this all-black jury—the bus driver, the secretary, the cashier—may find it hard to see Ollie as among the downtrodden.

—Audrey Poe

second underclass of unassimilated, undereducated, underemployed minority groups within American society." The *Denver Post's* J. Sebastian Sinisi reports that part of the problem, as Lamm sees it, is that these aliens breed quickly and irresponsibly. Lamm said that society must "find ways to dramatically cut down on illegitimacy, single-parent families and the breakdown of the American family." He then suggested that the government "should exercise some control over the reproductive rights of women on welfare."

Big Mac attack

Last year McDonald's Hamburgers Limited sued the Transnationals Information Centre (TIC) of London for publishing "Working for Big Mac," a critique of the burger chain's labor policy that McDonald's British affiliate considered defamatory. Unable to cover the costs of the suit, the multinational-corporation monitoring group is closing shop as a resource center. In a farewell note the center's staff writes, "The case highlights the problems facing small organizations which do not have the time and money to defend a legal action indefinitely." As part of a negotiated settlement with McDonald's, TIC will destroy all remaining copies of "Working for Big Mac." What follows are two sections of the expose that McDonald's found objectionable:

"McDonald's aims to keep labor costs within 15 percent of any outlet's sales. 'It's very tight,' said one store manager. 'If sales are down, labor costs must come down: you have to cut the staff and make those remaining work harder... The pressure to keep labor costs down means having less bodies in the store, so we're running around all day, all night....' And this from an employee: 'Twelve Big Macs down. I push bun bases in the toaster, right? 'Dress these regulars please. I'm squirtin' ketchup when the toaster starts beepin' buns-are-done. 'Where's the regulars? Speed up!' The guy on grill is givin' me grief 'cause meat is burnin' and the main man is bawlin' at him. Me legs are jelly, me throat dry and me head's explodin' under this stupid cap. 'Why's this cheese on crooked? Give me Big Mac bases now.' Outta onion, I run to the freezer. 'What's goin on? You're too slow.' I'm pissed off with the man shoutin' orders from the counter an' hate the guy cookin' untold burgers. 'Six quarters down.' I put frozen burgers on the grill an burn me hand. 'Why all this mess? Clean it up.' As I start wipin' trays, the timer flashes meat-needs-turnin', the toaster's buzzin' and someone's yellin' at me to fill up the pickle. I want to swear at the other crew that I can't do everythin' at once but I just slap crowns on the finished burgers shoutin': '12 Big Macs up.' An' all this in 160 seconds!"

Abandon all hype, ye who enter here

A post-death threat has been made against the remains of poet Dante Alighieri for ridiculing the prophet Mohammed. Dante, who died in 1321, skewered Mohammed in the 28th Canto of his *Inferno* as a "sower of scandal and schism" whose hell consisted of being "ripped from the chin to the part that breaks wind." According to the Associated Press, Mayor Mario Argone of the Adriatic port city of Ravenna, Italy, where Dante is buried, received a letter threatening to belatedly blow up the tomb for this blasphemy. Signed, the "Guardians of Revolution," the letter was apparently less inflammatory than ironic. Still, the mayor, treating the threat as more than academic, ordered increased police protection for the tomb.

Damn that dyke

Christian fundamentalists had been sending out about 1,600 letters per week to the producers of *Heart Beat*, an ABC series set in a women's health clinic. Jennie McKnight writes in *Gay Community News*, a Boston-based weekly, that the faithful were demanding that the openly lesbian character named Marilyn be written out of the script. Earlier this month ABC canceled the show on 24-hours notice, according to a spokeswoman for the *Heart Beat* production company. She said ABC gave no reason why the show was being canceled, but added that the ratings weren't very good.

News clips, memos, press releases, reports, anecdotes, raw gossip—send them all to "In Short," c/o *In These Times*, 1300 West Belmont, Chicago, Ill. 60657. Please include your address and phone number.

By David Moberg

CHICAGO

THE SON OF BOSS IS BACK. BY WINNING THE February 28 Democratic primary, Richard M. Daley took a giant step toward seizing the mayoral power that his father wielded in this city for 21 years.

But Daley's general election victory on April 4 is by no means assured. Primary voters were largely uninspired by the choice they faced: genial Gene Sawyer, selected to serve out late Mayor Harold Washington's term primarily by longtime Washington foes in the city council, and Daley, a lackluster and inarticulate "tough-on-crime" state's attorney. As a result, voter turnout citywide was

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the lowest in more than a decade for a mayor's race, about 65 percent of registered voters. The greatest fall-off was among blacks, Hispanics and the middle-class, white, lakefront residents.

Daley captured 55 percent of the vote. According to pollster Richard Day, Daley got only about 2 percent of the black vote, but more than 80 percent of the Hispanic and 92 percent of the white vote. Sawyer was the victim of a cruel irony. The white aldermen who put him in power after Washington's death completely abandoned him a year later, and, though relatively well-liked in many white ethnic wards, Sawyer got few votes there. Despite Jesse Jackson's ardent campaigning on Sawyer's behalf, many blacks stayed home on February 28 because they continued to resent the way Sawyer had gained power and did not see him as an inspiring or reform-minded representative of Washington's political movement.

Liberal whites who had backed Washington were split among Sawyer, Daley and, mainly, none-of-the-above—especially after reform Ald. Larry Bloom dropped out. Sawyer polled less than half of Washington's white vote, despite his non-threatening appeal as exemplifying "quiet, effective leadership."

The Evans factor: Although the Democratic nominee is usually a shoo-in in the general election, Daley faces a serious challenge from black Ald. Timothy C. Evans, the candidate of the Harold Washington Party, an entity formed especially for the general election after Evans opted out of the Democratic primary. Evans strategists figure that there is an untapped pool of nearly 200,000 voters who did not take part in the primary, and most of them are black. Along the lakefront and in Hispanic neighborhoods, at best a small fraction of the non-voters are strongly pro-Daley, and many Daley primary voters backed him with little enthusiasm. Daley, for example, polled fewer votes than former Mayor Jane Byrne did when she challenged Washington in the 1987 primary. Consequently, Evans strategist Jim Andrews believes Evans can win by picking up only 125,000 more votes than Sawyer.

The mayor is not endorsing Evans in the general election, and some of his allies are blaming Sawyer's loss on Evans, who did not endorse him. But it seems unlikely that such resentment is widespread among black voters. Also, Evans will be helped by the last-minute upset victory of Democrat-turned-Republican Edward Vrdolyak in a write-in campaign. Although widely disliked, especially by blacks,

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Ald. Timothy C. Evans: can he unplug Daley's new machine?

The Windy City's fate flies into April primary

Vrdolyak is a clever and tough campaigner. He won't allow Daley to run as he did in the primary, taking a conservative base for granted while making vague, unconvincing endorsements of many reform political aims. Even if Vrdolyak gets no more than a plausible 8 to 10 percent of the vote, he could pull enough conservatives away from Daley to compensate for embittered Sawyer supporters who refuse to vote for Evans. And veteran political operative Don Rose, a strategist for Evans, believes Daley "is close to a saturation level" of support.

To Evans backers, the April 4 election is a showdown between the movement and the machine. Many black Evans supporters—like veteran organizer Richard Barnett—refused to back Sawyer because they saw him as a black continuation of machine rule. They wanted to continue the "progressive reform" politics Washington initiated: participatory democracy; fairness and efficiency in government; a new neighborhood-oriented economic policy; and the inclusion of African-Americans, Hispanics and others excluded by the machine as full partners in civic power.

Neutralizing shades: Since declaring his candidacy, Daley has tried to distance himself from his machine past and appear as a "professional" state's attorney who has been

above the fractious fray of Chicago politics. In the primary he campaigned as a lukewarm reformer and made repeated, carefully staged stops in the black community. Without saying a word, he could hang on to his father's ghostly coattails among conservative, white and older voters. But he needed to appear non-threatening to blacks, not to win their votes but to prevent a "stop Daley" movement and to neutralize misgivings many white lakefronters have about crude racism and old-style machine politics.

Yet Daley and his closest allies fought Washington throughout the "council wars" of 1983-87. Daley backed the independent candidacy of his friend, County Assessor Thomas Hynes, against Democratic nominee Washington in 1987. And this was just one of dozens of incidents in which major white Democrats in Chicago refused to back Democratic nominee Washington. Yet the same white Democrats now demand that black party leaders back Daley.

Daley, as well as the strongly pro-Daley establishment press, pooh-pooh the idea that the old Democratic machine is still powering Chicago. Certainly the patronage army has shrunk, and city government is somewhat more open. But even under Richard J. Daley, the old-style, working-class political machine was gradually transformed by a close alliance

between Daley and the city's downtown business establishment. Political consultant and Daley critic Don Rose argues that the Democratic organization became "a machine of money-and-pinstripe patronage rather than small-time jobs for small people."

Now that money machine—including law firms that have done substantial business working for the State's Attorney's office and for various city agencies—has churned out a massive campaign war chest for Daley, reaching \$4 million before the primary. The money—including five contributions of more than \$100,000 each—reflects not simply the usual political insurance payment, or a crass bid for city business, but also deeper economic interests. One developer gave Daley \$30,000 on the assumption that he would put an end to the "hard bargaining" over developers' responsibilities to the city that started with the Washington administration.

But the flourishing neighborhood development groups that have made a creative effort to retain and reinvigorate both manufacturing and neighborhood-based business see Daley as a threat. Daley has criticized efforts to rebuild the city's manufacturing base, despite good evidence for the strategy's potential. Wim Wievel, director of the Center for Urban Economic Development, said that Daley, like his father, sees economic development as only real estate development, which brings in city property taxes, and favors the downtown over neighborhoods and manufacturing. By contrast, Washington saw the downtown office buildings as thriving on their own but believed the city could help precarious neighborhood economies as well as the manufacturing sector. Washington's main focus was jobs, not new construction. He believed "balanced growth" best served black and Hispanic workers as well as the city as a whole and its diverse tax base.

The role of race: Can Evans resurrect the grass-roots enthusiasm that will restore voter turnout to its recent levels and compensate for his huge money gap with Daley? He will certainly attack Daley more forcefully than Sawyer did, stressing Daley's big-money backing, his machine ties and his record of misconduct and favoritism as state's attorney. And Evans will sharply contrast his own support for higher state income taxes to fund school reform with Daley's equivocation on school funding.

The message will be reform, and the most receptive audience will be black. In the end, even more than with Washington, Evans will rely on black enthusiasm to squeak past Daley. Yet his campaign wants to avoid direct racial appeals, which turn off many potential white and Hispanic voters—and, as Barnett argues, alienates many older blacks as well. Despite the abrasive racial politics of some of Sawyer's supporters, blacks would not turn out just to vote for any black.

But Evans will have a hard time silencing his most race-oriented backers, and the media seeks out inflammatory comments. Even if Chicago voters divide on racial lines, racism and racial identification are only part of their motivation. At this point, the Daley new-style "money machine" benefits not only from white antipathy to blacks and from black divisions, but also from the more extreme appeals of blacks themselves to vote on racial grounds. □

By Salim Muwakkil

CHICAGO

ON THE EVE OF THE RECENT MAYORAL primary election here, Jesse Jackson faced the daunting task of convincing thousands of skeptical African-American voters to turn out for incumbent Eugene Sawyer. Taking his case directly to the people, Jackson spent most of that day speaking into microphones at the city's two black talk radio stations.

A few days after the primary, Republican winner Edward Vrdolyak—archfoe of the sainted, late Mayor Harold Washington—made himself available to those same stations in an audacious attempt to garner black support.

These two politically flavored anecdotes illustrate the growing influence of a major new player in the media game: black talk radio. Politicians are among the first to recognize the power of this relatively new for-

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mat, but the cat is now out of the bag. In many major U.S. cities, black talk radio is being monitored by journalists, police departments, advertisers, marketers, demographers, pollsters and hosts of others interested—for reasons good and ill—in the preferences and proclivities of African-Americans.

The talk fad: Talk radio is booming in the general market as well, but its importance is amplified in a community historically denied media access. "We had no idea people would become so attached to our AM station when we took a chance on the talk format eight years ago," explains David Lampel, program director of WLJB-AM in New York City.

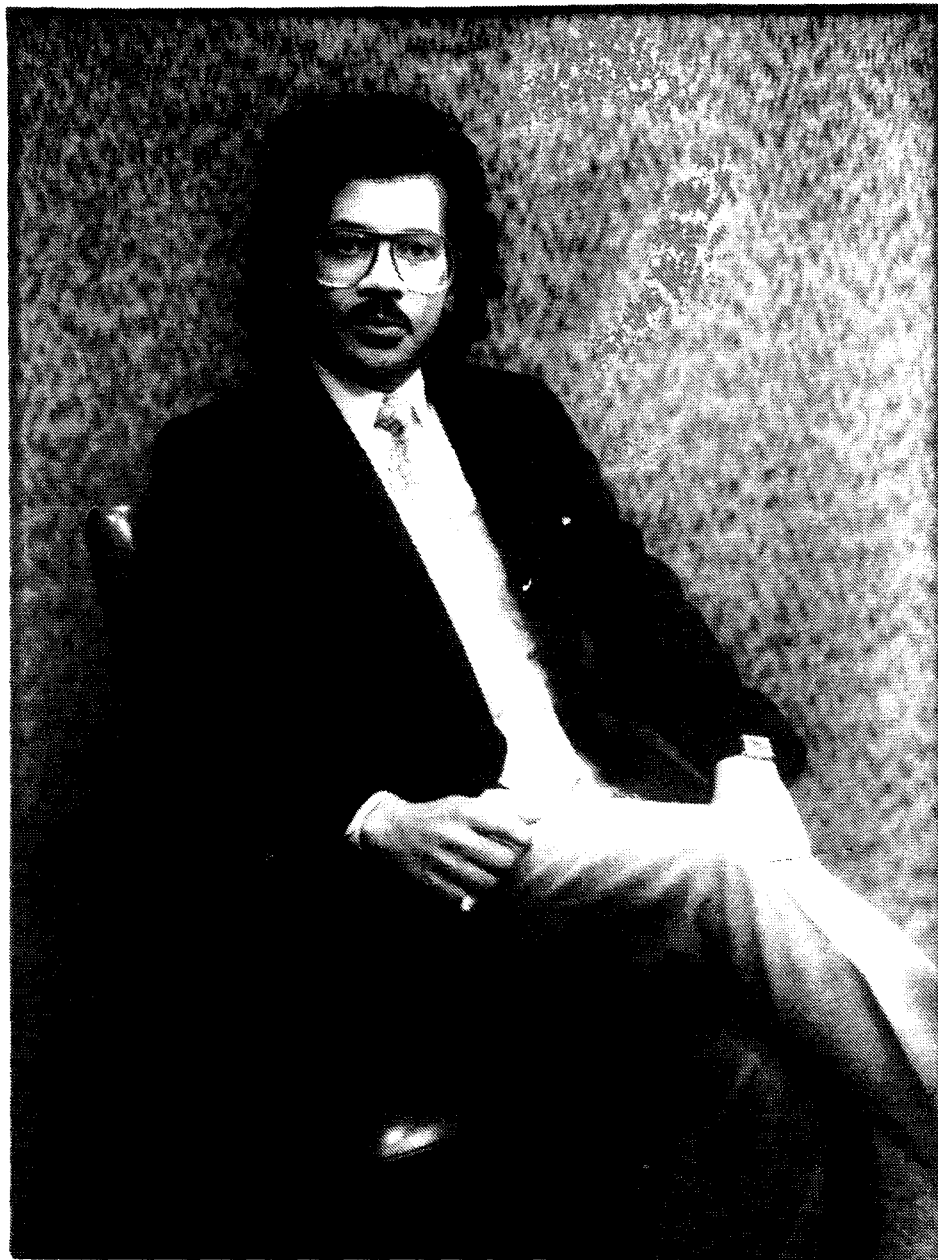
Lampel, who is also a senior vice president of Inner City Broadcasting—the black-run company that owns WLJB and WBLS-FM—says WLJB jumped from "a faint speck to among the highest-rated AM stations in the metropolitan area" on the strength of its talk format. "Actually," he adds, "there's really no point in doing anything else but talk on the AM band. Music belongs to FM [because of FM's technological advantages]." Like most other talk formats, audience call-ins form the basis of the program's content.

The programming change was born of necessity, Lampel concedes, but "we quickly realized how great a need the station filled. The listener response was phenomenal and we've since become an essential part of black New York. And I'm not just blowing our own horn. Many others have credited the station with making a difference in the awareness level of New York's African-American communities." What's more, the format has proven to be a commercial as well as civic success.

A similar transformation has occurred in Chicago. "We went from no ratings to the top 20 after changing to a talk format in March '86," says Hoyett Owens, general manager of Chicago's black-owned WVON-AM. "Talk radio is the savior of black AM radio," Owens maintains. "We may not be able to compete with FM for the entertainment market, but at this point we have the information audience all to ourselves." And, Owens adds, the audience is expanding. "This is one of the very few forums African-American people have to vent their frustrations and express their dreams. So they're very enthusiastic about the medium."

Indeed, many commentators credit the station with forging one of the most purposeful black electorates in the U.S. "Even before

Black talk radio sends powerful, clear signals



Hoyett Owens, general manager of Chicago's WVON-AM: black radio is talking back.

WVON became all-talk, when it just had occasional segments devoted to information, the station helped mobilize the community for Harold Washington's first mayoral campaign," says Lu Palmer, a longtime black organizer and host of one of WVON's more popular programs. "In 1987," he adds, "the station performed beyond and above the call of duty for Harold's cause."

Sincere flattery: The Chicago station's success has spawned a powerful competitor. WGCI-AM, a black-oriented station owned by the Gannett communications chain, switched from music to a black talk format in January 1989. To distinguish itself from its black-owned rival, WGCI-AM is targeting a "more upscale demographic," devoting more resources to the effort and including more talk about entertainment.

Some WVON staffers discern conspiratorial overtones in the Gannett challenge. "It's not farfetched to suggest that the system fears the growing influence of a serious black-owned talk station like us," says one producer. "One way to reduce our influence is to force us off the air through economics." Others welcome the competition. "It's the best thing that could have happened," explains Perri Small, a WVON producer. "First of all, it confirms the economic viability of the concept. Secondly, increased competition will help keep us on the ball."

The market segmentation of black talk radio's audience bespeaks an increasing commercial interest in the format's soaring

popularity. Journalistic interest already is high. "Every day I get calls from the major newspapers and television stations," says WVON's Small. "Most of the time they want to know what guests we have scheduled for various programs, or they want to confirm the quotes of some public figure who's appeared on the station."

The station is also closely monitored by a number of Jewish organizations listening for expressions of anti-Semitism. This practice was implemented last year after an aide to acting Mayor Eugene Sawyer was fired for making statements offensive to Jews (see *In These Times*, May 25, 1988). Many callers to the station denounced the firing. Those expressions of support for the dismissed aide, Steve Cokely, dismayed many Chicagoans, but they also revealed that WVON was a genuine conduit into previously uncharted regions of the city.

Additional evidence of black talk radio's new prominence was provided when New York City's police department revealed it regularly monitored WLJB-AM to get advance word on protest demonstrations or other civil disruptions. A host of black leaders blasted the police for the practice.

Off the quote circuit: Journalists who regularly monitor these shows are afforded rare glimpses into the internal dynamics of the black community. This saves them considerable legwork even as it enhances their coverage of African-American affairs. For example, after a group of black leaders an-

nounced that they thought the term "African-American" best described Americans of African descent and should be used more widely, intrigued journalists tried a new tack.

Instead of following the well-worn pattern—consulting those listed under "black expert" on the Rolodex quote circuit, arranging interviews with uninformed "grass-roots" folk, or seeking, perhaps even provoking, opposing viewpoints—representatives of the mainstream media invaded the studios of black talk radio.

"A lot of news organizations monitored our program when we discussed the issue of 'African-American' as a label for black people," explains Elisa Keys, producer of *Night Talk with Bob Law*, a late-night call-in program produced at station WWRL-AM in New York City and broadcast across the country by the National Black Network. The program is the only nationally syndicated live black talk show.

Chicago's Public Broadcasting Station, WTTW-TV, taped a segment of its piece on the "African-American" story in the studios of WVON as callers offered their varied opinions on the subject. Bruce Dumont, political editor of the Chicago public TV station, is among many local journalists who consider it essential to monitor both of the city's black talk stations.

Civic activators: "There's absolutely no better way to find out the concerns of nearly one-half of Chicago's population," Dumont contends. "It's very much like a black town meeting and the incredible range of viewpoints expressed help us in the mainstream media understand how wrong it is to regard the black community as monolithic."

There is no authoritative survey on the number of stations offering black talk formats, according to an editor at *Black Radio Exclusive*, the unofficial trade journal of black radio. But there is a general agreement that the programming concept is one of the industry's hottest. Talk stations in cities as diverse as Memphis and Washington have gained notoriety for their power as civic activators.

When the *Washington Post* debuted its highly touted magazine in 1986 with a cover story of a black drug dealer, black-owned radio station WOL-AM mobilized and organized a series of large demonstrations to protest the magazine's choice of subjects. Likewise, Memphis station WDAI-AM helped galvanize the black community to successfully demand that the city establish a national memorial at the site where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated.

As the format continues to prove its commercial viability, there's little doubt that black talk programming will spread into many areas of the country. This is good news for many black activists who believe that talk radio could prove as beneficial to the future of African-Americans as it is for the prospects of AM radio.

"It's difficult now to think of black New York without WLJB," said Utrice Leid, managing editor of the *City Sun*, an aggressive black-owned Brooklyn weekly. "By offering itself as an open forum for issues of concern to African-Americans, the station has made itself indispensable."

Many observers liken the growing influence of black talk radio to that exerted by the black press during its golden era of the early 20th century. The programming format has changed the game of urban politics forever in the cities where it's currently playing. And there's a good chance it will soon be playing in a city near you. □

IN THESE TIMES MARCH 15-21, 1989 7

By John B. Judis

WASHINGTON, D.C.

AS IN THESE TIMES WENT TO PRESS, THE SENATE was expected to reject Sen. John Tower, George Bush's nominee for secretary of defense. If that happens, the president will have suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Democratic Congress. While his popularity in the country remains high, he is quickly losing his grip on both Congress and the national press corps, whose support he

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needs to govern effectively. Comparisons with Jimmy Carter's ineptitude are rife.

But Bush wasn't the only loser in the rancorous Tower debate. The Democrats, who based their case against Tower on the charge that he had a "drinking problem," may have made some converts among Southern fundamentalists, but they also may have created a precedent that will haunt them if they ever recapture the White House.

Gunned down: Bush clearly made a mistake in nominating the former Texas senator. By selecting Tower, who was already widely known in Washington as a drunk and philanderer, Bush violated his own post-inaugural pledge to "avoid even the appearance of what is wrong." But Bush sealed his nominee's fate by antagonizing the powerful chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. Sam Nunn (D-GA).

When Bush nominated Tower on December 16, he declared that the FBI had given Tower a "clean bill of health," even though he had only received a preliminary summary of the FBI's findings. This summary was subsequently dubbed "chapter one" of what would become a voluminous eight-chapter report. Then Bush and his aides resisted Senate committee requests for the FBI and other documents.

When Nunn requested files about Tower's conduct in Geneva where he was the chief American arms negotiator in 1985-86, the Bush administration sent Nunn a set of papers from which every document mentioning Tower had been excluded. On February 7, after committee protests, the FBI issued a new report. Bush's counsel, C. Boyden Gray, spurned Nunn's attempt at bipartisanship by holding a private briefing on the report for the Republican members of the committee. The president further irritated Nunn and the other Democrats by declaring that the FBI's final report had "gunned down" all the allegations against Tower.

After the Senate committee rejected Tower on February 23 by a vote of 11 to 9, Bush should have withdrawn his nomination. But instead he insisted on carrying the battle to the full Senate—creating the conditions for a bitter debate that poisoned relations between the parties and between congressional Democrats and the White House.

Bush will now face more hostility from a Congress that is already annoyed with the president's budget. Under the guise of a few cosmetic increases in social programs, it slashes spending on housing and education far more deeply than the last Reagan budget. Bush will also face further questions about his lack of direction in foreign policy—dramatized during Bush's recent China trip (see story on page 9) and Secretary of State James Baker's meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze—and his inability to fill cabinet posts. With Tower's defeat, Bush will not have filled any of 44 defense positions.



Bush's Tower of trouble and Democratic dilemma

In the wake of the Tower imbroglio, two Republican columnists—William Safire from *The New York Times* and David Gergen from *U.S. News and World Report*—raised the possibility that Bush is off to the same kind of shaky start as Jimmy Carter. In Bush's March 7 press conference, one reporter asked him whether his administration was suffering from "malaise"—a Washington codeword for the affliction that destroyed Carter's final years.

Drinking problem: The Democrats played their own peculiar game with the Tower nomination. If Bush ignored pre-nomination warnings from Secretary of the Treasury Nicholas Brady about Tower's reputation, Senate Democrats initially pretended that they knew nothing about it: Nunn

endorsed Bush's choice of Tower, and the committee applauded Tower when he testified before it in January. But after new right activist Paul Weyrich denounced Tower's personal behavior in his January 31 testimony before the committee, and the committee itself began to be flooded with stories about Tower's drunkenness and philandering, Nunn and other committee members began to make an issue of Tower's drinking (see accompanying story).

From the beginning Democrats such as Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI) raised questions about the \$1 million that Tower received from four missile-producers immediately after he resigned as head of the U.S. START delegation in 1986. Tower's ties with military

contractors, Levin argued, would make it impossible for him to reform the military procurement process. These concerns were echoed in independent armed forces publications, including *Defense News*, *Army Times*, *Navy Times*, and *Air Force Times*. "Tower is so closely associated with the defense industry that many people will question virtually any statement he makes on defense issues," *Air Force Times* editorialized.

But in explaining his rejection of Tower, Nunn emphasized Tower's alleged drinking problem. Other Democrats, like Sen. J. Bennett Johnston (D-LA) and Sen. Kent Conrad (D-ND), followed suit. As a result, the Senate debate almost entirely focused on Tower's alleged drinking problem. This was unfortunate for several reasons.

No one denied that an unredeemed alcoholic would be unfit to be a secretary of defense, but Nunn and the other Democrats never clearly distinguished between Tower's being a boisterous, obnoxious drunk and an alcoholic. They contented themselves with saying that Tower had a "drinking problem" or "drank excessively." Such a charge left open the question whether they were attacking Tower's moral or mental credentials.

In making these charges, the Democrats also had the disadvantage of relying on reports whose contents they could not make public, but the leaks from the FBI reports did little to buttress their case. At worst, they showed that during the '70s Tower had behaved like a middle-aged frat boy. And several of the leaks turned out to be based on questionable witnesses.

Revenge factor: By emphasizing Tower's alleged drinking problem rather than his complicity with the military-industrial complex, the senators also played into the hands of new right activists like Weyrich and the Rev. Pat Robertson, both of whom want to build a political movement around anti-cosmopolitan small-town morality. In the Senate the Democrats found themselves in the odd position of fighting pro-Bush moderates like Sen. William Cohen (R-ME) or Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA), while radical rightists like Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC) threatened to join the Democrats in opposing Tower.

By rejecting Tower, the Democrats are establishing criteria for judging cabinet nominees that they might one day regret. The same kind of charges leveled against Tower could be leveled against Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) or Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT) if a Democratic president ever wanted to appoint them to a cabinet position. Nunn claims that his qualms about drinking only pertain to secretaries of defense, but one could certainly imagine a similar case being made against an appointee to secretary of education or health and human services.

The Democrats may have also nurtured a desire for revenge among moderate Republicans. Referring to Senate confirmation of former Sen. Ed Muskie (D-ME) as Carter's secretary of state in 1980, Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK) asked the Democrats, "Does anyone think that [a future] Ed Muskie is going to be confirmed in three hours if you do this to John Tower?" Such threats are by no means idle. After the Republicans blocked two of Lyndon Johnson's Supreme Court appointments in 1968, the Democrats blocked Richard Nixon's first two court nominees. If the Democrats plan to govern, they are going to have to make amends to the Republican moderates they alienated during the Tower fight.

The right angle on Tower affair

One of the strangest incidents in the three-month drama over John Tower's nomination was the testimony January 31 of new right activist Paul Weyrich. Sen. Sam Nunn (D-GA) and other Democrats on the Senate Armed Services Committee claim that they were caught entirely unaware by Weyrich's charges against Tower, but there is reason to believe that they knew what Weyrich was going to say.

On January 17 Weyrich wrote a letter to committee chairman Nunn asking to testify and saying that he had "questions surrounding [Tower's] moral character." In the past the Armed Services Committee has rarely accepted requests for public testimony, and when it has, staff members have interviewed the witnesses beforehand to see what they planned to say. But in this case the committee promptly accepted Weyrich's request without interviewing him.

In his opening statement to the committee, Weyrich alluded to questions

about Tower's character. "I have made enough personal observations of this man, here in Washington, to have serious reservations about his moral character," Weyrich said. But in his first question to Weyrich, Nunn asked whether he had any "direct knowledge" of Tower's personal behavior. Weyrich then uttered the famous words that speeded Tower's undoing: "Over the course of many years, I have encountered the nominee in a condition—a lack of sobriety—as well as with women to whom he was not married."

Were Nunn and the other Democratic senators really surprised by Weyrich's testimony? Or did Nunn or the committee staff use him to raise an issue that they could not raise themselves because of Senatorial propriety? Did the senators other than Nunn (a notorious teetotaler) think that drunkenness was the real issue or did they use it because they couldn't defeat Tower on his ties to military contractors?

—J.B.J.

Bush doesn't catch the Asian flow

By Marc J. Cohen

IF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION HOPED TO GAIN AN early, easy diplomatic coup from the president's whirlwind February 23-27 East Asian tour, it wound up instead with simultaneous domestic and foreign policy debacles.

The visit was supposed to be long on symbol and short on substance. As George Bush himself put it, he wanted to show regional friends that "we intend to remain a Pacific nation."

But the trip failed, not simply because Bush made no progress on the U.S. economic and diplomatic challenges in the Pacific Basin, but also because he managed to make a lot of mistakes without a single tangible accomplishment. In fact, he spent much of his time coping with the Tower fiasco back home.

Bush spent 24 hours in Japan, two days in China, and another one in South Korea. U.S. policy toward each country is at an important juncture, but Bush managed to alienate either the people or the government on two out of three stops. He made no missteps in Japan, yet he chose to duck the major disagreements.

The lowlights of the Asian hop were many.

In Japan Bush attended yet another funeral (Emperor Hirohito's) and met dozens of heads of state. But his quick stopover made serious discussions impossible. He will, sooner or later, have to address economic conflicts between Washington and Tokyo, and resistance among Asians—including

many Japanese—to a bigger security role for Japan.

Also left untouched was the damage an insider stock trading scandal has done to conservative, pro-U.S. rule in Japan.

The much ballyhooed return of "China hand" Bush to Beijing proved to be the nadir of the trip. He managed to offend his hosts on the issue of political repression without

PACIFIC BASIN

making any strong statements on behalf of human rights. Bush invited Fang Lizhi, China's leading dissident, to a Texas-style barbecue at the U.S. Embassy there. When Fang was prevented from attending, administration officials said nothing, but Communist Party chief Zhao Ziyang expressed public outrage at U.S. meddling in China's domestic politics. Upon his departure, Bush expressed mild, ambiguous "regret" over the affair.

Members of Congress and human rights groups had urged Bush to press the Chinese to release political prisoners and ease the crackdown on dissent in Tibet. However, a White House press aide said, "the issue of human rights was not raised per se." Later, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater claimed Bush had repeatedly and "eloquently" spoken up on behalf of civil and political liberties.

Adding insult to injury, Chinese security agents slammed a photographer following Barbara Bush around town into a wall. The victim turned out to be a White House staffer. Neither Bush nor his wife protested.

Within a week of Bush's departure, Beijing was reported to be brutally suppressing pro-independence demonstrations in Tibet.

The prince's bridle: Bush also met Cambodian resistance leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk in Beijing. Fitzwater said Bush expressed U.S. support for the prince's return to power. In a public toast to Chinese officials, Bush added that the U.S. seeks "peace and self-determination" in Cambodia. These statements seem at odds with both history (the U.S. helped overthrow Sihanouk in 1970) and present Sino-U.S. backing for the coalition of Sihanouk, a right-wing group and remnants of the genocidal Pol Pot regime in the Cambodian civil war.

Bush pressed the Chinese to stop their Middle East arms sales, which the U.S. views as destabilizing a volatile region. He received no assurances and was apparently unwilling to link this issue or human rights to the Western trade and technology China is eagerly seeking.

On the always thorny problem of Taiwan, the official New China News Agency quoted Bush as saying that the U.S. "one China policy" is aimed at opposing the island's growing movement for independence from both the Communist and the Nationalist regimes. He did not explain how the U.S. can hope for a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue if the island's people cannot freely decide their future.

Bush told the Chinese leaders that the U.S. welcomes Sino-Soviet rapprochement. No doubt the Kissingerians in the administration see a regional "quadrilateral of power"

among the U.S., USSR, China and Japan emerging to promote regional "peace and stability," even if this means suppressing popular aspirations.

A company man: Bush's nomination of his close associate Donald Gregg as ambassador to Seoul showed insensitivity to growing Korean anti-Americanism. Many Koreans believe that the U.S. has blocked democratization and reunification of the peninsula and treated Korea as a virtual colony. Gregg's nomination hardly dispels these perceptions, as he served for years in the CIA and was a key Iran-contra figure.

As if to compound this direct slap at students and others who want an end to American big brotherism, Bush told the National Assembly that Korea's farmers are going to have to give up protection of their markets from cheaper American produce. He did not explain what the farmers are supposed to do when they go broke. It was as though Bush wanted to alienate a conservative, anti-communist sector of Korean society.

Just a week after Bush left Korea, U.S. and South Korean troops began their annual "Team Spirit" war games. These are a tangible symbol of the unequal relationship, as most of South Korea's armed forces remain under the operational control of the United Nations (i.e., U.S. forces) commander in Korea.

In his inaugural speech a month before his trip, Bush had said that "the winds of democracy are creating new hope" in the Pacific Basin. Judging by what he said and did in East Asia, his administration intends to stand against that wind. □

Marc J. Cohen, who lives in Washington, D.C., writes on Asia. His book, *Taiwan at the Crossroads*, was published last year by the Asia Resource Center.

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PANTHEON

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

MID-FEBRUARY WAS TO HAVE BEEN A TIME of rejoicing in the West, as Soviet forces pulled out of Afghanistan. But celebration of the Reagan Doctrine's greatest victory was cut short by strange, unscheduled rumblings from the ranks of the very freedom forces the U.S. had lavishly armed against the Russians: militant Islam in southwestern Asia.

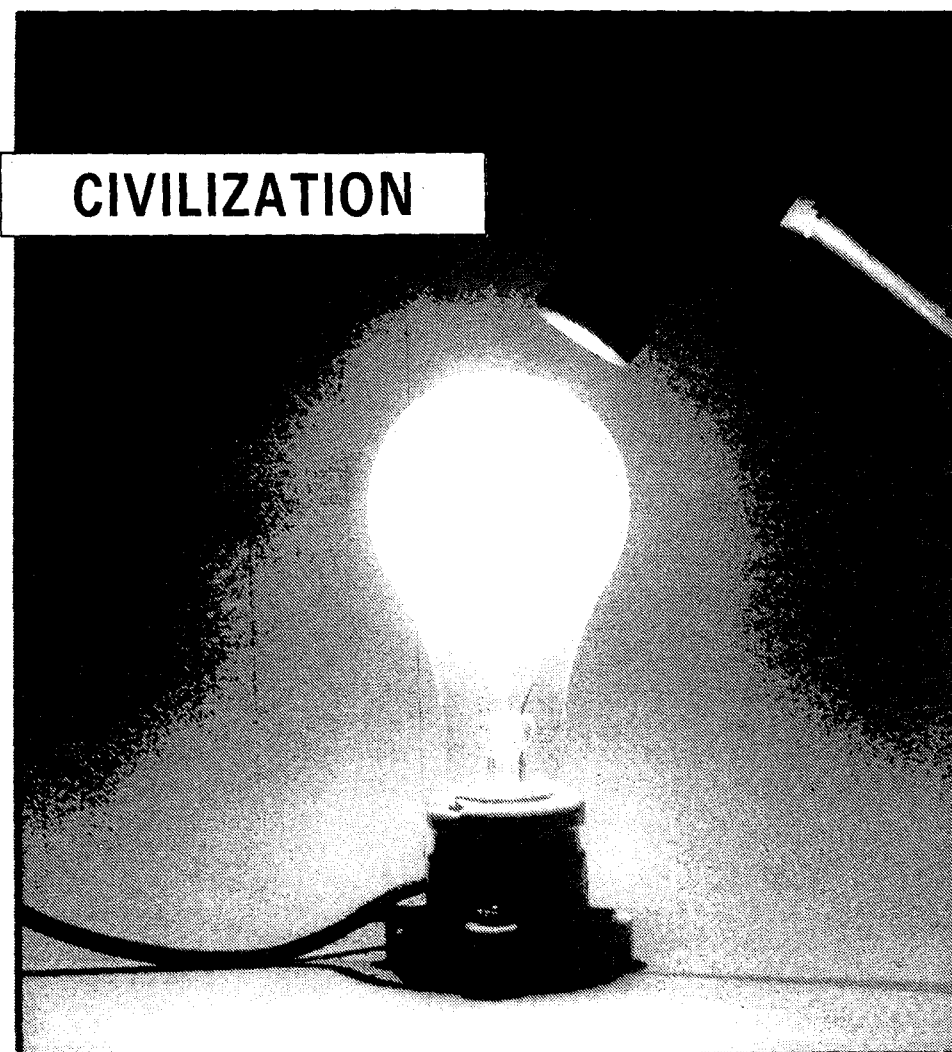
The protests against Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, began among Pakistani Moslems, first in Britain and then in Pakistan itself. That is where U.S. money poured in for years to support the late Gen. Mohammad Zia ul-Haq's dictatorship as it restored Islamic law and plotted to turn Afghanistan into a platform for destabilizing the Moslem world south of the Soviet Union by arming Islamic fundamentalists against communism. Patently unimpressed by the CIA's generous assistance to Allah, thousands of Moslems rioted against the Rushdie book outside the American cultural center in Islamabad. Six people were killed, and about 100 injured. Similar riots ensued in Kashmir and in Rushdie's native city of Bombay.

On the very eve of the final Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Ayatollah Khomeini stole the show by calling for Rushdie's assassination.

This bizarre turn of events plunged Western leaders into consternation. The Islamic Inquisition seemed to jeopardize European business' share in reconstruction of post-war Iran. Even more perplexing was the broader question of cultural integration of the growing Moslem populations living in Europe.

Khomeini's second front: In France, people who have been working for assimilation of immigrant populations despaired that their

Lesson of the Rushdie flap: let God sort them out



work had been "set back 10 years" by the Rushdie affair. In recent months their cause seemed to be advancing. The xenophobic Na-

tional Front led by Jean-Marie Le Pen had lost steam. The first public response to Khomeini from Moslem residents in France was

a statement in defense of free thought, signed by prominent intellectuals of North African, Egyptian, Syrian, Iranian and Turkish origin, mostly political exiles.

In the best tradition of French intellectuals, they proclaimed: "Against fanaticism and intolerance, we are all Salman Rushdie." The rhetoric rang true, according to a French scholar of Islam, Gilles Kepel, who pointed out in the daily *Le Monde* that the revival of anti-Western demagoguery "strikes by ricochet the intellectual elites accused of compromising with the West. By his offensive against secularized intellectuals of Moslem origin emigrated to Europe, Khomeini is opening a particularly disturbing second front, by stirring up contradictions that European policies of integration are striving to overcome."

The Rushdie affair also raised this question: when enlightenment loses its social promise, how long can it be successfully defended?

France's mainstream Moslem leaders called for the book to be banned while distancing themselves from Khomeini's call for blood. Cardinal Albert Decourtray, who remembered Moslem leaders' sympathy when Catholics recently protested against Martin Scorsese's film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, returned the favor. "Once again, religious people are offended in their faith," the cardinal declared. "Yesterday, Christians, by a film disfiguring the face of Christ. Today, Moslems, by a book on the Prophet."

But the extreme-right French Catholic integrist leader Abbé Aulagnier was "scandalized at likening defense of Mohammed to defense of our lord Jesus Christ." He saw nothing wrong with *The Satanic Verses*. After all, "Islam is a Satanic religion," the reactionary cleric observed, adding that Rushdie was right because "Mohammed really did go to a brothel."

This is scarcely the sort of public debate France's Socialist leaders had planned for the biennial celebrations of the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

If the word matters to religion, the image matters to contemporary consumer society, and the two came into nasty collision on a late February Sunday afternoon when 1,000 somewhat raggedy Moslems prostrated themselves in prayer at the Place de la République. A few cries of "death to Rushdie!" were heard. Parisians were horrified.

With municipal elections only a week away, Le Pen felt the wind coming back in his sails. This was just what he had been warning against, he crowed: "an invasion of Europe by Moslem immigration." It was "his duty" to call attention to the danger "of foreign Moslem immigrants whose ties are not broken with foreign authorities who could become enemies to our country."

President François Mitterrand had already drawn the official line. In France, "getting together to protest is normal; death threats are something else." Prime Minister Michel Rocard warned sharply that "any new call for murder will be immediately followed by

The Iran-U.S. end game

By Larry Everest

IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *THE SATANIC VERSES* STORY line and metaphor, symbol and reality spin topsy-turvy. So, too, in the real-life international conflict his book has occasioned. As portrayed by media and governments in the West, it is a conflict between democratic civilization and barbaric fanaticism. In Iran, *The Satanic Verses* is pictured as a Western imperialist attack on Iran and Islam.

Symbols aside, for the West (and the Soviet Union) this affair is less about freedom vs. tyranny than regaining a stranglehold on Iran, the strategic prize in the Persian Gulf region. And the principal concern of the Ayatollah Khomeini—whose attack on Rushdie came five months after the novel's publication and well after protests in India, Pakistan and Britain—is neither anti-imperialism nor Islamic purity, but maintaining power while establishing a new, post-Gulf War relationship with the world's major powers.

Like Rushdie's Mahound, Khomeini's Islam is shaped more by worldly concerns—in this case the difficulties besetting the Islamic Republic—than divine revelation. The Islamic Republic staked its political legitimacy on victory in the Gulf War—and lost. Its subsequent wave of political executions—esti-

mates run from 1,000 to more than 10,000—underscores the regime's fear of the resulting popular discontent.

Mullahs need moolah: After sustaining some \$400 billion in damages during the Gulf War, Iran's economy is in serious trouble. Industry is operating at 42 percent capacity and oil revenues are slumping. Last fall the Ayatollah Montazeri, Khomeini's designated successor, complained that "shortages, injustices, inflation, lack of sufficient income, extreme price discrepancies" had "totally paralyzed the country's economic situation."

Since the war ended last year, these pressures have driven the dominant factions of Iran's leadership to seek better relations, capital and technology from the West for economic reconstruction, which they have labeled Iran's No. 1 priority. Last month the nation's minister of oil, in a major shift, expressed Iran's willingness to borrow from abroad to finance reconstruction at home.

But these moves have created new tensions, reminiscent of the factional upheaval that eventually torpedoed the Reagan administration's Iran initiative in late 1986. There have been disputes within the regime over how far and how fast to go in normalizing relations with the West. And all in the government fear that rapprochement could further discredit Iran. As Khomeini recently remarked, compromises might lead the faith-

ful to "feel the Islamic Republic is retreating from its principal stands."

Throughout the course of the Iranian revolution, Khomeini has shown great skill in demagogically exploiting the anti-imperialist sentiments of the Iranian people for clerical ends. The threat on Rushdie's life is just the latest example. It is a calculated and theatrical effort to rally Iranians around the regime and divert their attention from its failures, while quieting inter-governmental squabbling and enhances Iran's credibility in the Moslem world. The goal is not to preclude relations with the West—for all its "neither East nor West" rhetoric, the Islamic Republic has never fully broken its military, political and economic links with either—but to slow down and solidify the regime before moving ahead.

U.S. and Western actions in the Rushdie affair have also been guided by a political agenda bringing Iran fully back into the Western orbit—rather than declared principles of defending civilized behavior and free speech. For example, the U.S. has refused even formally to protest not threats but the actual executions of thousands of Iranian prisoners since last August.

For the West, the problem is that Khomeini's threat was directed against a British citizen, challenging British sovereignty and raising doubts concerning Iran's seriousness about normalizing relations with the world's major powers and playing by their rules. The response has combined pressures and inducements which has characterized Western pol-

Continued on page 22

legal proceedings."

The conservative mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac, was even more harsh—toward both sides. The government, he said, should not tolerate that "fanatics come shouting for death in the streets of the capital of the rights of man." If they were French, they should be prosecuted, if foreigners, they should be immediately thrown out of the country.

Then Chirac attacked both "that miserable" Rushdie and "that fraud" Scorsese "who use blasphemy to make money." The conservative leader declared emphatically that "systematic exploitation of blasphemy bound to shock and upset people is contemptible."

Rally around: There are approximately 2.5 million Moslems in France, making it the second religion after Catholicism (France has only about 800,000 Protestants and 550,000 Jews). Most of them come from Arab-speaking North Africa. Arab Moslems have been particularly discreet in the Rushdie affair. The anti-Rushdie demonstration brought out a Pakistani immigrant population France didn't even know it had, as well as Moslems from Afghanistan and other non-Arab countries. Shouting against Rushdie gave these uprooted people a sense of shared identity.

Supporting Rushdie was doing the same thing for the West. Human rights have long been proudly inscribed on the banner that the West carries into battle against the rest of the world. Khomeini will never moderate his self-righteousness. In the West, however, some self-criticism might contribute to effective defense of Enlightenment values increasingly challenged by obscurantism.

Renaissance mien: In the West, from the Renaissance through the Reformation to the Enlightenment, the great excitement justify-

ing the liberation of words from religion was the prospect of new truth for human thought to discover, along with new mastery of the material world and greater human happiness. The prestige of humanistic ideas in the 18th century was related to their promise for social betterment, and this potential was an implicit justification for the human rights written into the American and French revolutions.

While claiming the Enlightenment and human rights as its identity, the West has often betrayed their promise.

Countless enthusiasts for Western enlightenment in non-Western societies, anxious to free their societies from the dead weight of authoritarian tradition, have been defeated by retrograde authoritarian elites in alliance with Western powers.

The power of Western states has repeatedly been used to crush the relatively enlightened or Westernized political currents in the Third World, precisely because such currents tended to be perceived as rivals for power. Iran provides the most striking example. In 1953, in one of its proudest achievements, the CIA overthrew the democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh when he started to nationalize the oil industry. Thereafter the U.S. helped the Shah suppress all progressive opposition, so that all that was left was Islamic fundamentalism. That was considered relatively o.k. because it was "anti-communist."

Today the champagne corks are once again popping in Langley, Va., as the last Afghan Westernizers are surrounded in the cities by U.S.-armed rural obscurantists determined to prevent women from learning how to read.

In Libya, Islamic fundamentalists oppose Muammar Khadafy for his liberal reforms and emancipation of women. They can no doubt count on the CIA's blessings.

The past decade has been marked by a worldwide regression from enlightenment to obscurantism. A return to the most authoritarian forms of religious obedience, not to mention various more or less harmless forms of magic, go hand in hand with the dominance of Reaganism, that is, aggressive free enterprise ideology or what Europeans

Afraid of revolution, the West has opted for obscurantism rather than progress in the East. Now the price.

call "liberalism." What the two have in common is a passive acceptance of the world order as determined by benevolent forces beyond human control: the market and God. Politics, collective action to improve the general condition, is devalued. Collective action requires a common language, and thus reason, enlightenment.

The sacred and the profound: When enlightenment loses its social promise, how long can it be successfully defended? Writers who defend Rushdie are defending their own interest group. Of course, they consider that their interest is the interest of all humanity, and they are right. But politically, humanity has to be convinced that this is so. Otherwise, enlightenment risks going back to what it has always been—a more or less secret

privilege of the aristocracy.

The Rushdie affair is an alarm sounding that this process could be underway. Rushdie's novel is an up-market consumer product on the world scale. Rushdie himself is an immigrant to the West from the Moslem East, but an upper-class educated one, integrated and Westernized compared to most. Western art has long been living on the disintegration of the sacred, and Rushdie's disintegration of Islam is understandable as an artistic act to his Western readers, even if much of the sense of his allusions to his culture escape them.

Yet censorship is regularly practiced in the U.S. in favor of ethnic groups whose sensibilities might be offended by insulting material. Women's movements are chronically split over pornography. Individuals and groups of people who feel the object rather than the subject of free expression can lose interest in defending such freedoms. If socialism and welfare states are banned in the name of free enterprise, the millions who are marginalized from the economic process will prefer Islam, which looks after its own.

The danger for free expression today, on a world scale, is an intellectual division, parallel to the socio-economic division, between an up-market of uninhibited free expression and a down-market of comforting ideology for losers. The imams and moral majorities of Islam, Christianity, Judaism and the rest will capture the down-market for themselves and force enlightenment back into the closet.

Public freedom requires public responsibility. Otherwise free expression will go back to being the exclusive private pleasure of the rich and powerful. □

How the New Democrats missed their finest hour

By Doug Smith

A YEAR AGO ED BROADBENT WAS ON TOP OF the Canadian political heap. The leader of the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) regularly placed first in polls of the country's three national political leaders. And the NDP, the perennial third party of Canadian politics, was running neck-and-neck with the opposition Liberals and governing Conservatives.

The title of a sympathetic biography of Broadbent that appeared last summer was *The Pursuit of Power*. When the book came out it seemed Broadbent's personal popularity and pragmatic approach to politics could vault the NDP into second—or even first—place in the November 1988 election.

Few would have predicted that within three months of the election Broadbent would announce his intention to relinquish his leadership of the party, or that the move would be greeted with equal parts of regret and relief.

Missed issue: The NDP emerged from the election with the same percent of the popular vote it has traditionally won. The New Democrats now appear to have a permanent grip on third place. The party's election campaign had centered on Broadbent—and because polls said the party was not credible on economic issues, the NDP's opposition to the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement was downplayed (see *In These Times*, Nov.

16 and Dec. 7, 1988).

This allowed the Liberal Party and its leader, John Turner—who was the country's least popular leader going into the election—to play the nationalist card. They did it well, accusing the Conservatives of selling

CANADA

the country's economic and political sovereignty to the U.S.

As Turner's popularity soared, the NDP campaign slowly ran out of steam. In the election's final weeks the party began running ads attacking Turner's credibility. While the ads had no small basis in truth, their overall effect was to split the vote in a way which helped Conservative leader Brian Mul-

Ed Broadbent leaves the once promising NDP as Canada's perennial third party. Having blown the election, the party now searches for a new leader and a way out of its electoral and political predicament. The auguries aren't good.

rooney win a second majority government.

In the weeks following the election the recriminations were quick. The most serious attack came from Bob White, the director of the Canadian Auto Workers and an NDP vice president. Organized labor had led the fight against the free trade agreement, and in some parts of the country had inadvertently laid the groundwork for a Liberal Party revival. In a letter that quickly became public, White wrote "I've never seen such a level of disappointment and anger among our activists, leaders of the labour movement and candidates at how the party strategists conducted the campaign."

And many of the negative implications of the free trade agreement are already materializing. Two days after the election Gillette announced its intention to shut down two Canadian plants and to shift production to the United States; two days after that PPG announced its own plant closure. The new year has seen continued plant closures coupled with a wave of mergers and foreign takeovers, usually followed by layoffs. In announcing these decisions most corporate executives say the moves are not related to the free trade agreement directly, but usually add that the agreement does necessitate a leaner, meaner approach to doing business.

The meanness also extends to government spending. In the dying days of the federal election, when it appeared the Conservatives might fail to win a majority, the business community weighed in with a scare campaign. The main message of this effort was that without free trade the economy would go to ruin. At the same time business promised free trade would not present a threat to Canadian social programs. Yet now that business has its majority, its tune is chang-

ing.

In a series of pre-budget meetings, Laurent Thibault, the head of the Canadian Manufacturers Association, urged the Mulrooney government to make deep cuts in social spending to reduce the deficit. And he linked those cuts to free trade. Thibault wrote, "The Canada-U.S. trade agreement that we have fought hard for creates great opportunities but also makes it more urgent that we tackle the outstanding issues that affect our competitiveness." During the federal election Broadbent had angered Thibault by citing an eight-year-old statement in which Thibault had said free trade with the U.S. would necessitate a reduction in Canadian social programs.

Another mistake? The past three months has also seen an evolving constitutional stalemate that threatens to revive both the separatist movement in Quebec and anti-French sentiments in the rest of the country (see *In These Times*, January 18). Broadbent's decision to support a decentralizing constitutional accord in an effort to win support in Francophone Quebec was for many New Democrats as disturbing as the downplaying of free trade.

Broadbent leaves his party an ambiguous legacy. He has served to normalize the image of a party that in many Canadians eyes had been a movement of the sandal-shod and the vegetarian. But as party members struggle to select a new leader from an array of uninspiring choices, it must also come to terms with a constitutional policy that is in a shambles and an election strategy that in the words of Bob White, led to the "disintegration of what should have been the New Democratic Party's finest hour." □

Doug Smith writes regularly for *In These Times* from Canada.

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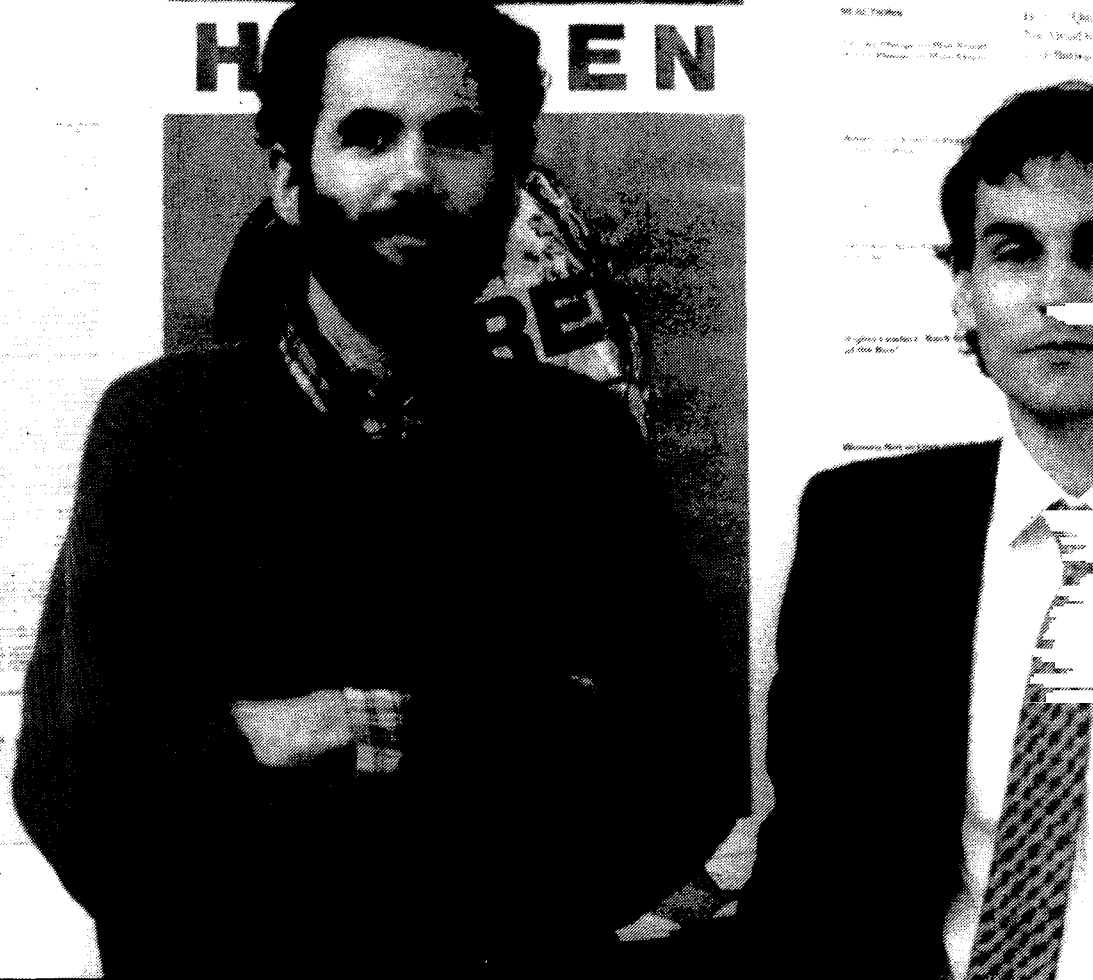
Being FAIR to the media

By Daniel Lazare

RATION RIGHTS

IT CAN'T
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The U.S.
QUAYLE BECC
"Uh-Oh" Say



Jeff Cohen, left, and Martin Lee of FAIR: coping with ignorance, arrogance and bias in a media-wracked society.

NEW YORK

ANYONE WHO READS THE DAILY PRESS in the U.S. can hardly be blamed for thinking of terrorists exclusively as swarthy types in *kaffiyehs* who spout off crazily about Allah and Palestinian liberation as they machine-gun innocent civilians. After all, everyone knows that Abu Nidal, Yassir Arafat and Muammar Khadafy are terrorists, while Ronald Reagan, George Bush and Yitzhak Shamir are the forces of civilization trying to stop them. Right?

Yes—if you believe the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New Republic* and the rest of the “respectable” press. But not if you listen to Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) and other dissident voices who wonder at the double standard that exempts people like the U.S.-backed contras (who also make a habit of massacring innocent civilians), while concentrating blame on a far smaller number of fighters in the Mideast. Does terrorism only consist of things they do to us? Or, just possibly, does the door swing both ways?

Inquiring minds want to know, including that of Jeff Cohen, FAIR’s executive director, who for two years has been heading up a campaign to inject a bit of balance into American press coverage. In *These Times* caught up with Cohen at FAIR’s headquarters in midtown Manhattan (located at 130 W. 25th St., New York, NY 10001; telephone [212] 633-6700) to learn more about the organization—and to find out just how it is that a supposedly free press manages to wind up so consistently slavish and conformist.

Tell me about FAIR’s history.

Many of us who formed FAIR used to work as publicists for activist groups in Los Angeles, where we saw that there were certain structural limitations in the mainstream

media that no public-interest group was talking about. One of the key movements we watched was the nuclear freeze movement, which arguably was the biggest grass-roots movement of the decade, with thousands of volunteers and hundreds of grass-roots groups spanning every state. Yet when it came to the freeze being debated, the leaders of the freeze movement, many of whom were women, didn’t get on national television. In their place were the so-called “responsible peace leaders” preferred by the mainstream media, men who in the ‘60s were considered war criminals, like William Colby, the former CIA chief, and Robert McNamara, former defense secretary.

Other things were just driving us crazy, incidents like the 13-part PBS documentary, *Vietnam: A Television History*, which was not all that friendly to the anti-war movement. Yet when the right wing hollered a little bit, PBS invited the right-wing group Accuracy in Media to come in and make their own one-hour rebuttal, which PBS then aired nationally. If PBS had also asked someone from the anti-war movement for a one-hour postscript, that would have been fine. But that’s not what was going on. For me, this was why we needed an organization to make sure that kind of thing didn’t keep happening in perpetuity. I think in many ways we have been able to change things.

What are you up against? What is the media, and who owns it?

Right now 26 corporations control most of what Americans see, hear and read through the media. General Electric, the second biggest military contractor, owns the biggest TV network, NBC. It’s not just GE and NBC, but a huge section of the biggest media—The *New York Times*, Gannett, Time Inc.—that is interlocked with the military-industrial complex.

Was the media ever liberal, as conservatives said it was in the ‘70s?

There was a brief opening, a period of *glasnost*, during and after Watergate, when investigative reporting was given more slack by even the big-business press. Sometimes you’d even see spokespersons for left organizations on television. But that period came to an end by 1979.

Since then?

Since then big business domination of the media has become unrestrained, beyond control, while the corporate elite has itself moved to the right.

There has also been a hardening of anti-communism and the virtually complete embrace of the anti-terrorism line as defined by the Reagan administration, the Jonathan Institute in Israel, etc.

Clearly, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*—supposedly beacons of liberalism—swallowed anti-communism and phony anti-terrorism hook, line and sinker. The *Times* featured the undocumented rantings of Claire Sterling on page one, which was unheard of. The *Post* ran an editorial about how the Soviets were “the principal source of terror in the world” [Jan. 21, 1981]. The *Times* editorialized against the nuclear freeze, the *Post* called two leading women’s groups in the nuclear freeze movement “Soviet stooge groups” [Oct. 6, 1982] and then had to retract, and both papers came out militantly, almost fanatically, against Mikhail Gorbachov’s unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing in August 1985.

The *Post* supported the invasion of Grenada, and both endorsed the bombing of Libya. The *Times* sided with the administration and against the Democratic congressional leadership by supporting military aid to the contras in 1986. And both papers endorsed so-called non-lethal aid in 1988.

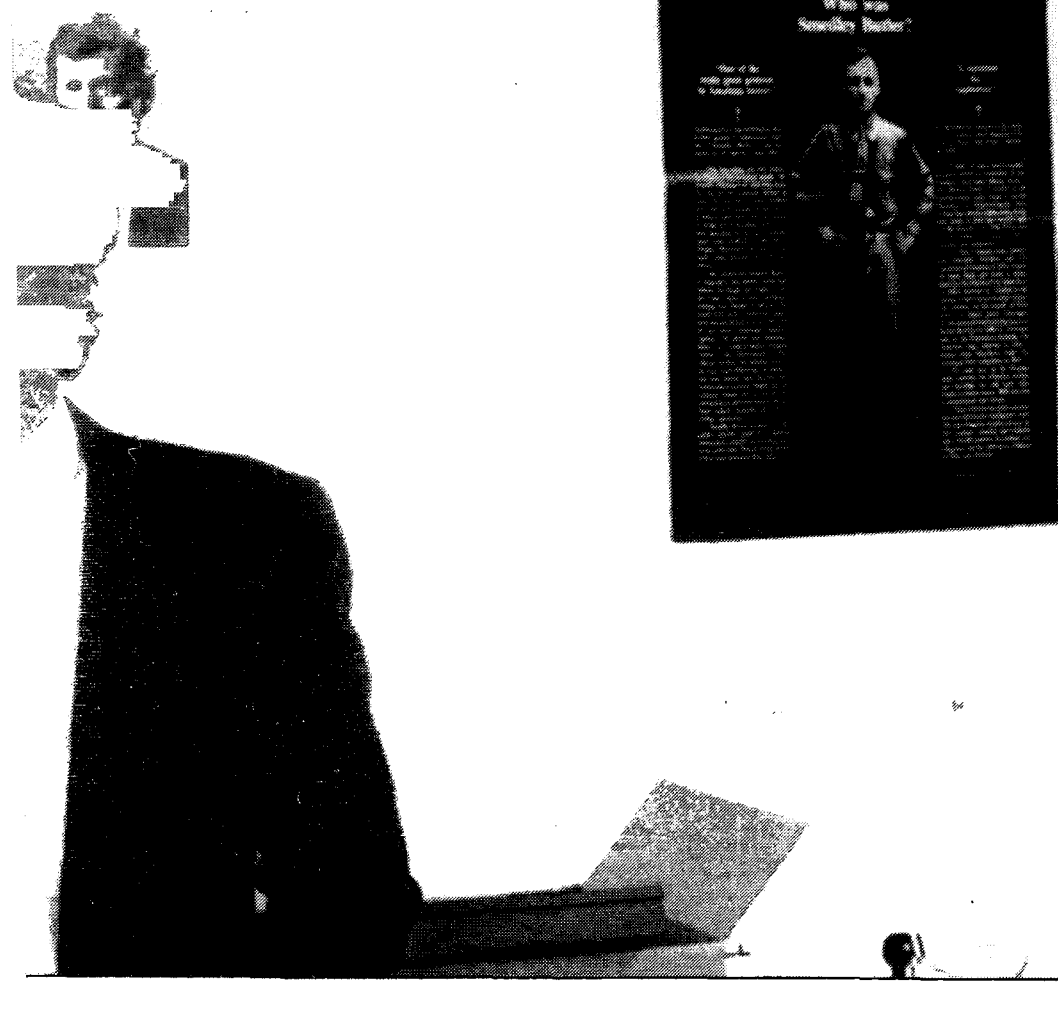
There was also a change in the very way the news was written.

Yes, the *Times* uses certain labels in talking about the Salvadoran guerrillas that it would never use about the contras. A couple of weeks ago they had a headline, “Salvador Rebels Step Up Terrorism,” referring to the alleged execution of about seven mayors since March 1988—even though, when you read the article closely, you saw that the state has caused many more civilian deaths. Yet any abuses that the Salvadoran guerrillas have committed against civilians cannot begin to compare with what the contras have done in Nicaragua. You can look at any objective or independent human rights group that covers the region. Yet the paper of record has never printed the headline, “Contras Step Up Terrorism.”

None of this started with Reagan, of course. Jimmy Carter defined human rights in an extreme, self-serving way as well, and the press accepted it.

Of course. The media have always covered the Cold War from a home-team perspective—root, root, root for the home team—but I think it got much worse during the Reagan era. Part of the reason was that the Washington press corps liked Reagan, and they didn’t like Carter. The best evidence for the media’s soft treatment is Reagan’s own media handlers, [James] Baker, [David] Gergen and [Michael] Deaver, who in fact were thrilled in some cases with the treatment they got from the mainstream media. They were stunned that they got away with murder.

George Bush was able to use the same techniques during the campaign that Reagan used for the first six years of his administration—grinning McCarthyism, staged photo opportunities, keeping the candidate off-limits to the media. If a 30-paragraph article appears on page 16



showing that the furlough issue is a hoax, for instance, it's not important as long as you control headline television and as long as you control the front pages. As Bush's press secretary, Peter Teeley, was quoted as saying in 1984: "You can say anything in a debate and 80 million people hear it. If reporters then document that candidate spoke untruthfully, so what? Maybe 200 people read it, or 2,000, or 20,000."

So what do you think FAIR has accomplished?

One thing we've shown is that a little bit of media activism can go a long way. The first big campaign for FAIR dealt with the *Amerika* miniseries, the Cold War miniseries about a commie invasion fantasy. The *New York Times* referred to it as the biggest controversy in the history of television, and it was sparked by a FAIR office that at the time had three people. When PBS was ambivalent about putting a movie on the air called *Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done*, a documentary about how the religious right is linked to the Reagan administration, we started a letter-writing campaign and showed "the film PBS wouldn't let you see" to packed audiences in L.A. We got TV critics to publicize it and, sure enough, PBS decided to take it off the shelf and put it on. PBS is the TV network that is clearly most vulnerable to public pressure.

Why is that so?

Because one-third of its money comes from citizens like you and me. It's the only TV network where I can get the president of the network on the phone. We have been complaining about PBS' regular talk shows for some time. They have four talk shows hosted by partisan journalists of the right, three of them by editors of the right-wing *National Review*—Bill Buckley's *Firing Line*, John McLaughlin's *One on One* and the *The McLaughlin Group*—while the one news talk show devoted exclusively to foreign

policy is hosted by a hawk, Morton Kondracke. They also air three regular programs that deal with the business agenda, Louis Rukeyser's *Wall Street Week*—Rukeyser, by the way, is very much an anti-labor commentator—Adam Smith's *Money World* and the *Nightly Business Report*. Yet on the public network you have not one regular talk program that deals with the agenda of the public interest community: consumers, labor, environmentalists. So we've been demanding that PBS launch two new programs—a public interest show and one hosted by a partisan of the left—to balance out the other seven regular programs.

Tell me about the original people who helped form FAIR.

The idea for FAIR was mine, but there were several individuals who helped me develop the idea and launch the group—two publicists and organizers from Los Angeles, Linda Valentino and Linda Mitchell, and Martin Lee, who's now the editor of *Extra!*, FAIR's bi-monthly publication.

I've always been a media-watcher, but it wasn't until I went to Europe for two extended trips in 1984 and '85 that I saw how even the mainstream media of Western Europe were so much more serious than our media. All over Western Europe, you could talk to workers and students, and even if they were conservatives they had knowledge about the world that the average American didn't. Yet we are the society that is the most media-dominated, the society that has the television set on in the average household seven hours a day.

I saw magazines like West Germany's *Der Spiegel*—which is far better than anything like *Newsweek* here—and West German, Dutch and Swedish television regularly airing hard-hitting investigative pieces, interviews with world and national leaders of the left, right and center. I knew then that the mainstream media didn't automatically

have to exclude the left. I saw that there was a need for a group in the U.S. that would yell and scream until progressives were included in debates on national television.

There actually is a group like FAIR in England called the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, which is heavily based on the labor movement and which fights the BBC and other media outlets for fairer coverage of labor, women and racial minorities.

But FAIR still doesn't have the backing of a broad, deep popular movement such as exists in Western Europe.

But we have things they don't. We have a tradition of peace-oriented foundations, which has given us more staffing than the group in London could ever dream of. In England they don't have many local media, but our media are so vast it is very easy for us to gain visibility in local outlets.

So you came away impressed with the ideological diversity of the West European press and were similarly struck by the ideological narrowness of America's national media?

It was just before the Iran-contra scandal broke in 1986, when some of the funniest stuff about Reagan was being written. *Fortune* magazine had a cover story on "What managers can learn from manager Reagan" [Sept. 15, 1986] and *Time* magazine had a July 4 cover story called "Why is Reagan so popular?/Yankee Doodle Magic" that was just pathetic.

I remember that story well. It celebrated Reagan's illusion-spinning abilities.

It was a win-win situation. First Reagan wins by manipulating the media and the public, then he wins by getting laudatory stories out of the media about how brilliantly he manipulates the media and the public.

So I came back here, and we started looking for funding sources. Originally, I was hoping I could continue living in my beloved Venice, Calif., but people told me FAIR wouldn't be credible unless I moved to New York. So we moved here in July 1986, and FAIR operated originally out of Marty Lee's apartment on the Upper West Side. We got donations from David Hunter and the HKH Foundation and the Skaggs Foundation that helped us launch. The vision of FAIR was to take the progressive critique of the media out of undercirculated publications and off the library bookshelves....

And carry the war into enemy territory?

Yes, into the newsrooms. In the '60s there was this phrase, "exploiting the contradictions in the system." Well, we've been able to exploit the contradictions in the media. To attack television, we went to the press. When we wanted to attack newspapers for taking those right-wing ads that Mobil pays for, we wrote an op-ed piece and sent it to secondary papers in cities where the primary newspapers accepted the Mobil ads. We figured we could attack Media A in Media B, and then try to attack Media B in the pages of Media A.

Besides Central America, what are some of the other areas of the world that the press especially distorts?

The Middle East, although coverage there has been improving because the objective conditions are so glaring with the struggle being carried forward by teenagers and even younger kids armed with nothing but stones and bricks. The old propaganda

technique of dispensing with the whole Palestinian people by calling them terrorists just isn't working. ABC News deserves the most credit. Dean Reynolds in Israel has done some great coverage.

Southern Africa coverage is atrocious. The *New York Times* reporter there is a South African citizen [John Battersby], and I think the view of South Africa is generally through liberal white South African eyes—if that's not a contradiction in terms.

What about Afghanistan?

That's Dan Rather's favorite liberation movement. He loves it; it's like a game to him. We've been shocked that the conflict could have gone on so long and there has been so little about who the so-called "freedom fighters" are.

There's been virtually nothing. Are they worried about what they might find, that many of these groups are Islamic zealots?

And want to set up an Islamic state exactly like the Ayatollah's in Iran?

Yes.

When I do radio talk shows in major cities, I always use that as an example. I ask callers: "Who are these people? What's the name of even one faction leader?" We don't know. How hard would it be for any journalist at the *New York Times* or *Washington Post* to do an analysis and do it regularly? It's been one of the greatest coverups by the media in recent years.

Since the Iran-contra affair, the *intifadah* and Gorbachov, the world situation has obviously changed a great deal. How has the role of the press changed it?

Every time Gorbachov or Arafat has made a big move forward, many people in the media have greeted it warmly. But the *New York Times*, day after day, says, no, this isn't what it seems, he didn't really recognize Israel, it wasn't a forthright denunciation of terrorism, and so on. Then you'll see a retrenchment over the next few days as the other media start falling back. It became almost comical during the week that Arafat kept recognizing the state of Israel and the *New York Times* kept saying he didn't. Finally, Shultz said he did, and the *New York Times* came around.

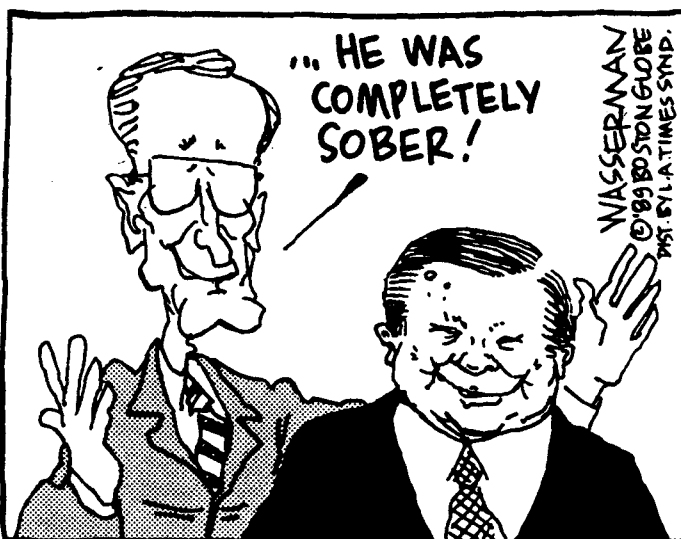
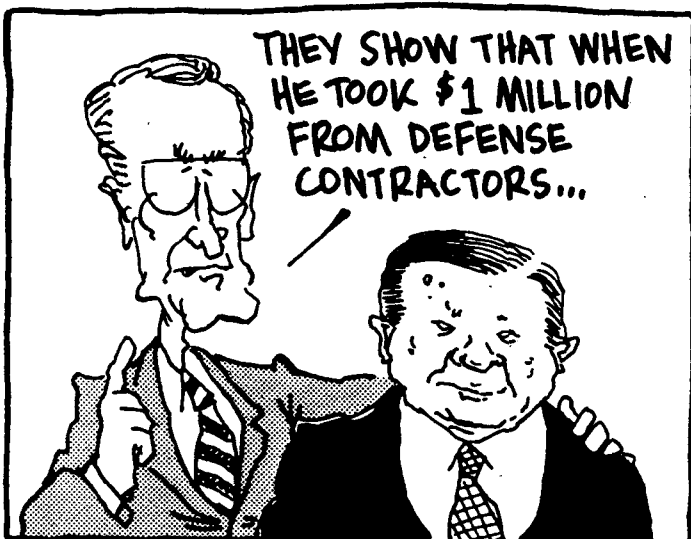
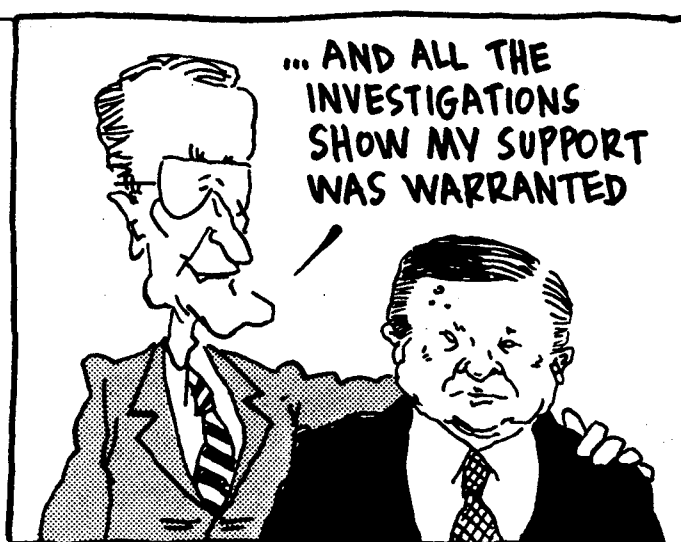
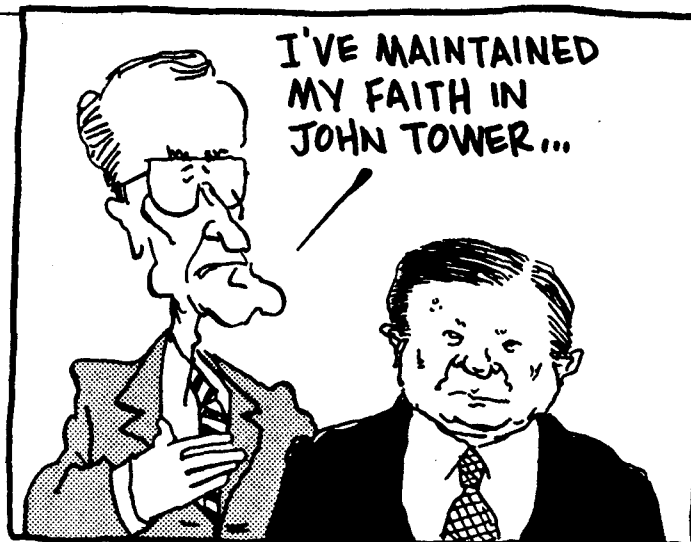
We read the *New York Times* closely and watch and tape the three TV networks, plus MacNeil/Lehrer, and if people don't understand what a "paper of record" is, they should try doing what we do just for a week.

They'd find that the *Times* sets the pace?

If a foreign country hasn't been covered for months and then the *Times* covers the country, that night two of the three networks will have something on that country. People outside of New York often don't understand our *New York Times* obsession. We often get letters complaining "so much of your publication is about the *Times*, yet we don't even read the *Times* out here." But the point is that they do read the *Times*. They don't know it, but they're reading the *Times* every time they turn on the TV news or listen to National Public Radio, because the *Times* is sanctifying what is an issue, what isn't an issue, and who the experts are who should address each issue.

The role we play is that of an instant response mechanism. The moment we see something, we messenger over a correction. Some media outlets correct it, but it usually takes the *New York Times* weeks to get it right. □

EDITORIAL



WASSERMAN
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Tower's fall symbolizes crumbling of Reaganism

It's been a pleasure to see Senate Democrats standing in firm opposition to the nomination of John Tower as secretary of defense, but depressing that the great bulk of their public comments, and even more of media attention, focused on his drinking and "womanizing." The defeat of the Tower nomination marks the end of congressional acquiescence in the Reagan policies of the last eight years and a recognition, however tentative and obscure, that the Reagan and Bush military policies have reached a dead end. Eight years of growing military expenditures and steady slashes in environmental protection, education, housing and health care are approaching crisis levels, while the ideological justifications for military Keynesianism ring more and more hollow.

In short, it's time for substantial cuts in military spending and a reorientation of federal spending priorities, and John Tower was not the man for this. Pitifully few senators addressed the issue of Tower's indebtedness to military contractors—though he is known

in the Senate as "a man who never met a weapons system he didn't like." In private, though, the issue was much more prominent in many senators' minds. One reason not much was said on this, as Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) commented, was that while Tower did a little work for the million dollars he got from military contractors, "the rest of us take political action committee money" and expect to be trusted as having no bias toward the donors.

In fact, of course, our entire government has been corrupted by the military-industrial complex, and our entire society has been distorted as a result. The Reagan military policies were justified ideologically as an attempt to bring back the glory days of American imperial ascendancy, but times are changing. The American empire is in sharp decline, threatened more by its capitalist rivals in the Far East and Europe than by world Communism or Third World revolutionary nationalism. And as a result of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union, the popular perception of threats to Western security from the Eastern devil is eroding.

It's difficult to say how much of this was in the minds of the senators as they voted Tower down. But there is no doubt that their commitment to a militarized economy and aggressive counterinsurgency only a couple of years ago would have made such an act impossible. That's progress.

George Bush-John Tower mystery unravelled

Why is George doing it? What does he have to gain from his dogged defense of sleazy, money-grubbing John Tower? You may have been wondering about this and casting mental aspersions on the president. But you would be wrong to do so, because, in a way, this is Bush's finest hour. It proves that there is honor among—well, politicians.

The real issue is not the president's defense of his would-be secre-

tary of military procurement, but why Bush has not yet rewarded ex-Sen. Ed Muskie. Or have you forgotten that Muskie—along with Gen. Brent Scowcroft, now Bush's national security adviser, and Tower—was a member of the Tower Omission? The three-members of the Omission, you may recall, were President Reagan's official whitewashers of the Iran-contra affair. George owes John. And he's doing his best to pay him back for not saying anything in the Tower report about the then-vice president's role in that affair (see *In These Times*, March 11, 1987 and Feb. 10, 1988). But to be consistent, he should offer something to Muskie. If not, it's just partisan politics as usual. Maybe, after Tower tipples—er, topples—Ed will get the nod.

The Machinists Union is fighting for our lives

In a very real sense, the machinists striking Eastern Airlines and the pilots supporting them are fighting to maintain the lifeblood of our nation. In all other modern industrial states the basic transportation infrastructure is considered as vital, and therefore inviolate,

as arteries in the human body. Here, under the Reagan and Bush administrations, the airlines upon which Americans depend for their peripatetic way of life have become mere Monopoly-board tokens to be played with or discarded in the hope of a quick profit. But speculative economics deflate at 35,000 feet. On your next trip would you rather read about Frank Lorenzo's latest triumph over his employees in the pages of *Fortune*, or enjoy an airline on which workers are doing their best and being properly recompensed for providing safe, reliable and comfortable travel? Not merely on ideological grounds, we support the unions in this contest.

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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LETTERS

Slanted

MAGGIE GARB'S ARTICLE CONCERNING ABORTION and post-abortion syndrome (*ITT*, Feb. 22) presents opinions cleverly disguised as fact and put them in a newspaper-like journal so that others would be inclined to believe them as fact. This kind of reporting is slanted so far to the liberal side that I wonder if there is anyone who wouldn't notice. Whatever happened to doing research on both sides of the argument? Or, if she is really writing true journalism, why does she just skim over the research that suggests that some women really do experience post-abortion syndrome? Garb seems to think that there is no one who would fall into that category. My sister experienced this and still remorsees over her abortions. This may not be a syndrome of itself, but I'd be willing to bet a lot of other women go through the same emotions.

Nobody that agrees with abortion seems to want to acknowledge that there are problems with it. But let's wise up. We all know there are problems with abortion, just as there are complications in pregnancy. Let's not slant the argument so that those people who want to protect the lives of the unborn are portrayed as underhanded liars who fabricate medical and psychological traumas to buoy their cause. Let's keep editorials on the editorial page and reporting in the news section of the newspapers. I'll bet my letter ends up on the editorial page. But then, I am not pretending to write a researched article.

The type of articles you print generally have been consistent, but since this article I don't believe I understand the philosophy of your publication. You seem to advocate the rights of the poor in Central America, be against violence, condemn acts of terrorism, praise peacemakers and focus on human rights. Yet you switch sides and print a cover story that supports the killing of unborn children. Please tell me how you can integrate these two into a cohesive philosophy.

Jim Anthony
Arvada, Colo.

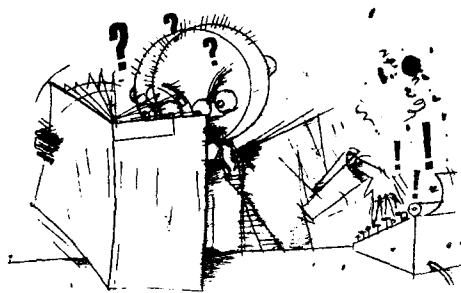
Rabid

I WAS VERY DISAPPOINTED TO READ THE RABID outburst by Maggie Garb on the abortion issue (*ITT*, Feb. 22). She displays so much of what she condemns in her opponents—frenzied unreasoning and muddy emotionalism.

Having been pro-choice for many years, I was turned around when a cogent, very basic argument was given to me for supporting the pro-life movement (though I am in little sympathy with much of the hysterical hypocrisy of the Right-to-Life organization).

Abortion is a human rights question—not a religious one.

Since *Roe vs. Wade*, women's rights have dropped like flies to support the original premise. Women no longer have the right to a full explanation of medical procedures from their doctors. (In the case of abortion only. No mention need be made of late term risks, nor of possible side effects. Even with minor plastic surgery a woman *must* be told of any risk, no matter how remote—or she may rightly claim malpractice if they occur. Abor-



tionists are exempt from this problem.) Women have no right to know about and guide their daughters' medical procedures. (In the case of abortion only. If a child needs a finger sewn, a tonsil removed, an eye treated, informed consent by a legal guardian *must* be obtained before work is started. For an abortion, which is at least as risky as a tonsillectomy, the consent is not only not necessary, but avoided.)

In congressional hearings not long after *Roe vs. Wade*, the question of when the exact moment human life begins was explored by top physicians and biologists from around the U.S. Everyone who testified, whether pro-life or pro-choice, said the same thing—human life begins at the moment of conception. Given this statement, it is inconceivable that any group that promulgates itself as one that upholds the rights of all against exploiters could possibly support elective abortions.

I would hope that Garb will educate herself on this question from a human rights point of view, and seriously think the consequences through to the end.

Patti Raynis
Sonoita, Ariz.

Rational

THANK YOU FOR MAGGIE GARB'S FRONT-PAGE ARTICLE, "Abortion foes give birth to a 'syndrome'" (*ITT*, Feb. 22). Not only was it exceptionally well researched and well written, it revealed the shaky facts on which the right-to-life movement is based. Quoting "studies" and statistics, they exploit the power of suggestion in the hope that women will come forward as victims of "post-abortion syndrome."

Garb writes with a true sense of the issues, exposing the anti-abortionists' problematic arguments rationally. I am heartened to see *In These Times* covering abortion as a front-page issue. It's a discussion none of us can afford to avoid, and it is crucial in this political climate that we make ourselves heard.

I encourage all those who can to join the April 9 "March for Women's Lives" in Washington, D.C.

Barb Morrison
New York

Citizens Corps

I AM GREATLY SURPRISED BY JOHN B. JUDIS' endorsement of the Democratic Leadership Council's proposed Citizens Corps (*ITT*, Feb. 15). The most objectionable thing about the DLC's proposal, as I understand it, is not that it asks citizens to take on social duty—an admirable request—but how it does so and who it asks.

The proposal would have vouchers earned through participation in the Citizens Corps replace other federal education assistance. There are two problems with this plan. First, the persistence of differences in educational opportunity has been and continues to be one of the grossest means of enforcing class-based privilege (surely Judis knows this). Countering those differences with direct governmental payments and low-interest loans should not have to be justified or earned by those who receive such aid.

This aid is truly an "entitlement," in that the recipients are entitled to the aid and should in no way be asked to justify it. Given the Reagan-era assault on college grant and loan programs and on education funding in general, now is not the time to put federal education programs under the heading of "a new social compact based on reciprocal obligation and civic duty." The proposal is especially odious considering the exploitative nature of requiring low-income would-be students to work at sub-minimum wage jobs in order to "qualify" for educational assistance—assistance best thought of as a corrective for the iniquities of our culture and not as "favors and privileges bestowed by government."

The second problem is the truly exploitative nature and intent of this proposal. The DLC plan would be just another impediment to education for low-income people; it would thus serve a function opposite its ostensible one, and make it easier than ever to keep the doors of higher education closed to all but the wealthy.

A Citizens Corps that would encourage and enable a cross section of able citizens to perform public works would be excellent. The DLC's proposal seems to be nothing of the sort. Instead, it would take an already inadequate (though easily justified) aid program and make it needlessly and counterproductively burdensome. I was much taken aback by Judis' support for this plan.

I should also add a word about the military aspect of the plan. The notion of assigning vouchers of greater value for military service than for civilian service is highly questionable, to say the least.

Benjamin Moss
Austin, Texas

Independent politics

RECENT LETTERS AND EDITORIAL COMMENTARY (*ITT*, Nov. 23, Dec. 7, 1988) have raised issues surrounding left participation in the Democratic Party and the role of third-party politics. Third-party candidacies, as *In These Times* pointed out, often can be characterized as token rituals rather than as efforts seriously contending for power.

Nonetheless, *In These Times* has overemphasized participation in the Democratic Party to the virtual exclusion of left third-party politics. Condemning all left third-party politics as sectarian comes uncomfortably close to mainstream trivialization of the left itself. To ignore or brush aside all left third-party campaigns or electoral efforts outside the Democratic Party is also sectarian.

Third-party or independent campaigns may be appropriate at times, particularly on the local level. "Non-partisan" electoral strategies, such as referendum and initiative campaigns, also deserve more attention than they have received either in *In These Times* or elsewhere on the left. At other times, particularly relative to national campaigns, it may make more sense for the left to participate actively within the Democratic Party.

Rigid adherence to one side or the other of this debate needs to be replaced with strategic and tactical flexibility. By way of one specific proposal along these lines, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the Socialist Party U.S.A. (SP) should explore closer working relations, if not reunification. DSA's Democratic Party focus and the SP's third-party approach are complementary in a number of respects. The non-sectarian left would greatly benefit from strengthened ties between what are its two best and most representative groups.

Jay D. Jurie
Orlando, Fla.

Editor's reply: We regret having given the impression that we believe local independent or third-party election campaigns are poor strategy. Obviously, in such places as Burlington, Vt., and Iowa City—and in many other cities where independents can mount effective campaigns—party labels don't matter to the majority of voters, and primary elections are not important forums. In such cases it matters little how candidates are labeled.

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

SYLVIA



by Nicole Hollander

VIEWPOINT

On an otherwise sour election day four months ago, there was a bit of good news from California. Voters there passed Proposition 103, a consumer-rights measure designed to both roll back property/casualty insurance rates and to force insurers to obtain prior state approval for future rate increases (see *In These Times*, Nov. 2, 1988, and Jan. 18, 1989). The proposition—written by consumer advocate Harvey Rosenfield and endorsed by Ralph Nader—also promotes competition within the insurance industry.

The successful effort to pass Proposition 103 endured tremendous obstacles. Organizers for the proposal had to overcome a \$66 million opposition campaign from the insurance industry, which sponsored three pro-industry propositions that were disguised as consumer-rights measures. The industry pushed these propositions with an unprecedented media campaign that included a seven-month barrage of radio and TV advertising. But that was not all. Advocates of Proposition 103 were also faced with a \$16 million campaign from the trial lawyers—the insurance industry's usual foes—who sponsored their own reform proposal, albeit one that lacked Proposition 103's legal punch.

Both of the opposition efforts outspent any such previous campaign in California. And yet these high-tech and high-profile campaigns were defeated by an operation that spent less than \$400,000, discounting fundraising expenditures. If the proposition survives court challenges California will be transformed from a state with little effective

California's Proposition 103 went against pundit tide

insurance regulation to one with the toughest and most progressive regulatory structure in the nation. Proposition 103's grassroots victory offers hope—and may serve as a model—for future efforts on the left.

As part of its ongoing series on the prospects of the left within the Democratic Party, *In These Times* asked Proposition 103 campaign manager Bill Zimmerman, a veteran political operative and media consultant, to explain the victory. While Zimmerman's conclusion will inspire many readers, writer S.M. Miller—whose story appears on the opposite page—offers a sobering look at the state of the left. Miller explores the contradiction between traditional liberalism's focus on "production-oriented" issues such as labor and the left's more recent emphasis on "consumption-oriented" issues like those involved in Proposition 103.

By Bill Zimmerman

HOW DID PROPOSITION 103 WIN? BY breaking the rules. We relied on free media (the press) rather than paid media (advertising) for the wholesale delivery of our message. We built a campaign based on door-to-door work in a state where that tactic has failed so often that it was no longer receiving serious consideration. Unlike anyone before us, we col-

lected the 571,000 signatures we submitted to qualify 103 for the ballot primarily through the mail and door-to-door (so that we could simultaneously ask for small donations) rather than with professional signature-gatherers who operate far more efficiently but must also be paid.

We relied on Ralph Nader to be our fea-

The DEMOCRATS:

Planning a party

tured endorser even though he is often taken to be a polarizing and controversial figure. We had virtually no support from elected officials because fewer than a handful across California had the courage to back us—although, now that 103 has passed, we have to beat many of the rest of them off with a stick. Only one major newspaper in the state gave us its endorsement. We never took a poll or conducted a focus group. We didn't have the money, but we had little trouble reading the numbers in the telling actions of our opponents.

It was an insurgent campaign that made ample use of press stunts and theatrics to capture and cultivate a populist image. Nonetheless, it was a campaign firmly based on a problem of real and perceived importance, and a solution of real and apparent significance. That's why we won.

School for success: The lessons that emerge from, but go beyond, this experience are these:

- The effectiveness of negative advertising is inversely related to the significance of the choice being presented to voters. In an election where voters believe that the choice they are given is relatively meaningless, such as the one between George Bush and Michael Dukakis, they can be manipulated by negative ads. But when the outcome is thought to have a serious effect on their lives, as was the case for gouged and outraged California insurance consumers, voters are fully capable of ignoring negative ads, no matter what their number or how well done.

- Voters are neither too ignorant nor too disinterested to make thoughtful choices about complex issues. California voters supported the one insurance proposition they had to work the hardest to learn about. Paid propaganda about the other four was easily and everywhere available. But to find out about 103, they had to read an apparently dry newspaper article or talk at length to a friend.

In addition to the five insurance propositions, there were 24 others on the California ballot, more than at any time in over 40 years. In San Francisco there were an additional 24 municipal propositions. Yet, contrary to expectations, the falloff in votes between the presidency at the top of the ticket and Proposition 103 near the bottom was minimal.

- The desire for economic democracy is

high enough to transcend both party and ideology. Almost half of the people who signed petitions to place Proposition 103 on the ballot were Republicans. In Orange County, surely the most conservative and Republican metropolitan county in the nation, 103 got 48 percent of the vote (as opposed to 51.2 percent statewide). This happened despite the fact that 103 entails extensive government interference in private industry, as well as price regulation, and was endorsed by Ralph Nader.

When the attention of voters, any voters, is sufficiently focused on matters of self-interest, their presumed ideological conservatism falls away. Why? Because most voters are highly dissatisfied with the current distribution of wealth and power in the U.S.

What else explains the remarkable number of white votes captured in this past election by a black candidate for president who started with higher negatives than any other figure in national politics? The message was lost on the consensus-minded moderate who became the nominee of the Democratic Party, and equally lost on his inept consensus-minded handlers. And that's precisely why so many voters came to think the choice between Bush and Dukakis was unimportant.

- There are times when the most old-fashioned campaign tactics can prevail over the most modern. The California insurers were beaten by a campaign that relied primarily on two of the most old-fashioned forms of political communication, word-of-mouth and the press. In very conservative San Diego County, where the 103 campaign did extensive door-to-door work, it got 44 percent of the vote. In very liberal Sacramento County, where it did none, 103 got only 39 percent. Press coverage in both places was equivalent.

Canvassers employed by 103, operating out of six offices throughout the state, knocked on slightly more than 1 million doors. On election day voter turnout ran to approximately 10 million. That can only mean that the people they talked to talked to others. Clearly that did not occur because of their superior salesmanship, but rather because they were addressing an issue of great concern to people with a solution that was genuine.

- The credibility of an honest person is a treasure of incalculable political value. Proposition 103 was identified with Ralph Nader from the beginning. The most common response from voters asked about the five insurance propositions in the earlier stages of the campaign went something like this: "It's too complicated for me. I'm voting for the one Nader supports." But Nader's advice was accepted by so many people not only because they understood that his integrity has never been compromised. They knew, as well, that today in the public arena few honest people still remain among us.

Unfortunately, these five lessons add up to one simple conclusion. The voters are healthier than the critics think. It's the electoral system that's sick.

Bill Zimmerman is a partner in the Santa Monica political consulting firm, Zimmerman, Fiman & Dixon. His previous clients include Chicago's late Mayor Harold Washington, former New Mexico Gov. Toney Anaya, Former Colorado Sen. Gary Hart and numerous progressive ballot propositions.

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VIEWPOINT

By S.M. Miller

AN INTERVIEW WITH CONGRESSMAN Barney Frank (D-MA) in the Dec. 22, 1988, *New York Times* and Tom Wicker's column the next day questioned the nature of present-day liberalism. Frank and Wicker both call for a more pragmatic attitude that accepts the absence of congressional or popular support for liberal issues like gun control. They would drop advocacy of such issues and concentrate on the popular "bread-and-butter" issues.

But the challenge that we of the left face is not as narrow nor as clear-cut as Frank and Wicker imply. It is more complex than simply determining what issue to focus on or what specific position to take. A good illustration of the fundamental nature of the difficulties of the left is the gap—if not a chasm—between the old-time liberal religion of production, growth and employment and the new sentiments of neighborhood, environmental protection and grassroots democracy.

Inherent contradiction: Traditional liberalism focuses on jobs and income, economic questions that involve mainly processes of production. Unions were the agents of this kind of liberalism, campaigning on the job for higher wages and in the political arena for economic growth. Today, the left's significant gains are in organizing people in community-based activities that seek to improve the consumption side of life—maintaining or improving neighborhoods and services, reducing taxes and utility bills, preserving the value of homes, cleaning up waste dumps. The production approach is about jobs and making income; the consumption strategy is about the household and the spending of income, the off-the-job satisfactions and problems.

There is a special difficulty, if not poignancy, for the left in this split between production and consumption orientations. Despite efforts at economic organizing, particularly around plant shutdowns, the left's current claim to political importance revolves around its ability to organize and mobilize in response to issues that affect consumption (see story on opposite page). These concerns frequently oppose production or job interests.

Managed trade—a better political term than protectionism—may ensure employment for those in threatened industries, but may also raise prices for their products as international competition decreases. Calling for protected firms and industries to invest and reduce costs may eventually result in better prices, but there is no guarantee. Investments may not be effective or, if effective, the reduced costs may pass not to consumers but to shareholders through higher profits. The production concern of promoting employment opposes, at least in the short run, the popular interest in containing prices, a consumption issue.

Similarly, the concept of comparative worth has intrinsic merit but increases personnel costs that must be offset by increasing local or state taxes or by reducing governmental services. In non-progressive tax systems, which are used in most localities and states, the burdens of such changes can hurt the very people the left tries to organize.

The clash between the protection of jobs or the environment, between production

To win, the left needs more than pragmatism

and consumption, has no easy resolution. Preventing polluting firms from moving in or continuing production threatens, for example, jobs in the plant. This problem complicates political activity based on organizing people around household and consumer grievances. Groups like Citizen Action, ACORN and San Antonio's COPS cam-

has had trouble recognizing. (In the '80s economic growth in Western Europe resulted far less in increased employment and lowered unemployment.) Our unwillingness to look at the Reagan record, including foreign policy, in a balanced way stunts our political effectiveness.

We are unclear about what our goals and ambitions are and what our actual practice is. Our practice shows that the operating objectives of today's left do not envisage possibilities of large-scale transformation of society. Rather, we hope to make the society more mixed, more livable because of greater government spending and more democratic through promoting local, populist activities. Our politics are coalitional and electoral, which mainly means working within the Democratic Party, rather than building a strong, continuous, independent organizing presence around an evolving agenda and deepening political education.

Long-term goals? That is where we are, even if many of us want to carry the label of "socialist" and want to think that we are working for profound change. In fact, we operate in and for a mixed society, but

The DEMOCRATS:

Planning a party

paign against utility price hikes or increased taxes, struggle to get traffic lights and paved streets or to maintain fire stations that are threatened with closure. They also push for legislation requiring early warning about plant shutdowns, but such production-oriented activity is emphasized less than consumption-oriented actions.

To put the challenge bluntly, progressive proposals along the production front frequently clash with these groups' popular base or constituencies. This political dilemma never gets resolved. The efforts at coalition-building—bringing together many diverse groups around a political candidate—may bypass the problem temporarily, but may also result in diminished organizing efforts during electoral off-seasons.

The clash between production and consumption orientations is the surface of the deeper left issues of how we understand both the contemporary U.S. and ourselves. The U.S. is a mixed society, not a one-dimensional nation. The Reagan years heightened grave problems through despicable treatment of many and yet made remarkable economic gains in growth, employment and low inflation—an achievement that the left

Only occasionally do we recognize the gap that exists between our daily operational goals and the principles for which we profess to stand.

largely ignore the tensions that result from working in this society at this particular time. Only occasionally do we recognize the gap between the operational goals demonstrated in our daily work and the larger goals we profess. We have short-term poli-

cies—a gain in many ways because we are now political actors—but don't discuss their internal contradictions, such as the conflict between production and consumption strategies and tactics. Nor do we address longer-run issues: what do we want that is reasonable to pursue in this society, and how do we move toward it?

Raising these issues is not to condemn what we do. But it does point to our reluctance to confront the economics, politics, sociology and philosophy of this mixed society—and the left's role in improving it. As we are working in and for a better mixed society, we should deepen our understanding of it and us. Part of our task should be critical examination of current positions in many realms, and part in the development of new ways of thinking.

Much of left thought and action today is warmed-up liberalism: expanded social programs, active government and expanded government spending, low interest rates, more regulation of business. A progressive supply-side economics is emerging but it is not integrated and may be in partial conflict with the rest of the progressive agenda. In sociology, we are only beginning to examine the changes in social structure and the implications for progressive objectives and politics. We may welcome attention to family issues, but funding child-care programs is only a partial response. In philosophy, we have failed to modernize with a compelling case for greater equality and fairness. In politics, the ethos of positive feminism, environmentalism and mutual aid has not been fused with traditional left demands. We do not call, for example, for less materialism and commercialism in American life or lift those desires into electoral and progressive politics.

Barney Frank's critique is too limited and 1992-oriented. We of the left have a broader task of self-examination.

S.M. Miller is a senior fellow at the Commonwealth Institute, Cambridge, Mass., a contributing editor at *Social Policy Magazine* and former professor of sociology at Boston University.

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IN THESE TIMES, MARCH 15-21, 1989 17

Revolutionaries and Functionaries: The Dual Face of Terrorism

By Richard Falk
Dutton, 222 pp., \$17.95

The Culture of Terrorism

By Noam Chomsky
South End Press, 269 pp., \$12.00

The Other Face of Terror: Inside Europe's Neo-Nazi Network

By Ray Hill, with Andrew Bell
Grafton (London), 312 pp.,
3.5 pounds sterling

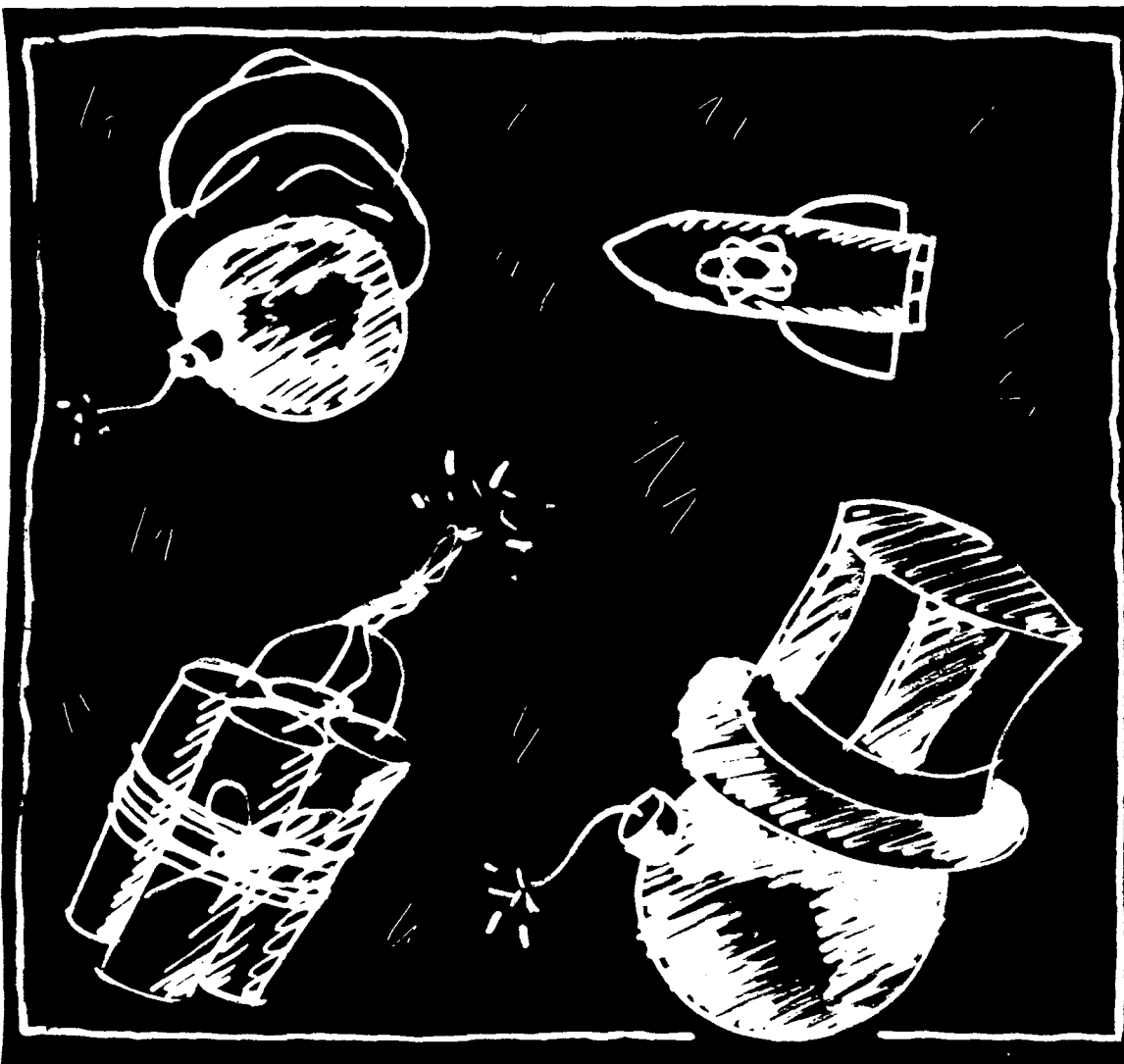
By Martin A. Lee

IN JANUARY, SHORTLY AFTER U.S. FIGHTER planes shot down Libyan jets over the Gulf of Sidra, the Pentagon released a slick, 130-page report—with photos and bar charts—called “Terrorist Group Profiles.” Praising it as “an effort to raise public awareness,” *CBS Evening News* correspondent Terrence Smith noted that the Pentagon spent \$71,000 to produce and distribute the report. “Cheap, by Pentagon standards,” Smith concluded, “and few are likely to question its value.”

A cursory glance at the report's table of contents is enough to discern the Pentagon's only slant. The section on African terrorism lists only one organization: the anti-apartheid African National Congress. El Fatah, the main PLO faction, is included among Mideast terror groups, despite Yassir Arafat's renunciation of terrorism. Latin American terrorists are all left-wing revolutionaries; right-wing death squads aren't mentioned. And the roll call from Western Europe features the defunct Direct Action from France, while omitting any reference to numerous neo-Nazi terror groups that are still active on the Continent.

That CBS should give its stamp of approval to such a blatantly biased U.S. government report underscores an essential point of Richard Falk's book, *Revolutionaries and Functionaries: The Dual Face of Terrorism*. “The American understanding of terrorism,” Falk writes, “has been dominated by recent governmental efforts to associate terrorists with Third World revolutionaries, especially those with Arab countries.... The media have generally carried on their inquiries within this framework of selective perception. As a result, our political imagination is imprisoned, with a variety of ugly and unfortunate consequences.”

A narrow view: By confining terrorism to anti-Western political activity and violence, the government fosters “the illusion that terrorism is alien to American patterns of conduct in the world, that it is done to us, and that what we do violently to others is legitimate counterterrorism,” says Falk, a professor of international law at Princeton. This narrow and self-serving conception has skewed mainstream political discourse to such a degree that the



State of terrorism address

slaughtering of innocents through covert operations, so-called retaliatory attacks and other forms of low-intensity savagery by the U.S. government elude the terrorism label.

In Falk's view, terrorism and counterterrorism are often two ways of describing the same activity. “The terrorist,” he argues, “is as much the well-groomed bureaucrat reading the *Wall Street Journal* as the Arab in desert dress looking through the gun sights of a Kalashnikov rifle.” Indeed, the activities of both are symbiotically linked, with government functionaries invoking the specter of revolutionary terror as a pretext for using excessive force to preserve “national security.” Oftentimes, the main effect of nihilistic “terror from below,” as Falk refers to revolutionary violence, “is to erode whatever degree of democracy exists, to impair civil liberties of the citizenry and to strengthen the hand of the state in relation to domestic dissent.”

Falk is careful to point out that the scope of revolutionary violence, which is largely symbolic, pales in comparison to the counterterrorism of state functionaries who are prone to drenching entire populations in blood. Since the U.S. government has the upper hand in the psychological war, revolutionary terror continues to exert a distracting hold on the American imagination. Although their numbers are much smaller, the targets of revolutionary violence receive far more mass media attention than the victims of U.S.-backed

functionary terror, who are reduced to a cold statistic, if reported at all.

During much of the Reagan era, U.S. officials—aided by a pliant press corps—pushed the spurious notion that the Soviet Union was Terror Central, the conspiratorial source that called the shots for terrorists worldwide. The issue of terrorism

VIOLENCE

was especially useful for furthering a Cold War agenda. Its efficacy as a propaganda tool has not waned with the warming of superpower relations. Falk emphasizes how counterterrorist rhetoric has been geared largely toward converting public anxiety over political violence into support for militarist foreign policy and increased intervention in the Third World. Seen in this context, the bombing of Libya was as much salutary medicine for Vietnam syndrome jitters as it was a plot to murder Muammar Khadafy.

Semantic chicanery: What is most disconcerting about the phenomenon of terrorism is how banal it has become in our society. Hence the title of Noam Chomsky's book, *The Culture of Terrorism*, which focuses on Iran-contra and related scandals. A once-secret 1982 Pentagon intelligence report described the U.S.-backed contras as a “terrorist” organization, but this raised hardly an eyebrow in Congress, as politicians quibbled over strategies for containing the Nicaragua threat

in contra aid debates. “The Reagan administration came to office declaring that it would dedicate itself to eliminating the plague of international terrorism, as it prepared to launch programs of international terrorism on an unprecedented scale,” Chomsky stated. “Predictably this was all accepted uncritically by the educated classes.”

Chomsky never tires of lambasting the press for its role in limiting the damage of the Iran-contra affair through disinformation and semantic chicanery, while steering clear of taboo subjects like Lt. Col. Oliver North's (and George Bush's) plan to suspend the U.S. Constitution in the event of “a national crisis” such as “widespread internal dissent or national opposition to a U.S. military invasion abroad.” One recalls the deafening silence of the media after Rep. Jack Brooks (D-TX) tried vainly to raise this issue during the 1987 hearings. Debunking the notion that the scandal was merely an aberration of an otherwise healthy system, Chomsky provides details about Iran-contra and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA, the national crisis management unit), that should have been widely reported, but were not. FEMA director Louis Guifrida, for example, had once written a memo recommending the internment of all “American Negroes” in “assemble-centers for relocation camps” should there be a major civil disorder.

Chomsky, like Falk, draws an important distinction between whole-

sale state terror practiced by U.S. clients in Central America and atrocities of a lesser magnitude committed by Abu Nidal or Islamic fanatics in Lebanon. Although the point is well taken, merely shifting the discussion from pirates (Khadafy, Khomeini) to emperors (Uncle Sam) is not sufficient. One runs the risk of perpetuating the myth that Arabs and leftists have a monopoly on “retail” terrorism. This is hardly the case, as Ray Hill shows in *The Other Face of Terror*, a harrowing account of his experiences as a high-placed militant-turned-mole inside Western Europe's neo-Nazi underground.

The right terrorism: Hill's story begins in the mid-'60s when he was first exposed to the anti-immigrant polemics of a national socialist group in Britain. A poor working-class youth, he resented the foreigners coming to Leicester, his hometown, and he became an instant convert to the racist cause. After a few brushes with the law, Hill moved to South Africa, where his prowess as a fiery orator got him elected chairman of the South African National Front. Eventually, however, he realized the extent of the danger, the evil that was being perpetrated through attacks on innocent people. Upon returning to England in 1979, he made contact with *Searchlight*, the London-based anti-fascist magazine, and from then on he lived the double life of a spy posing as a dedicated Nazi.

Hill, who later testified before the European Parliamentary commission on racism and Eurofascism, describes in vivid detail the machinations of a neo-Nazi international, with its secret paramilitary camps, gunrunning operations, printing presses that churn out “No Holocaust” literature and other unsavory tracts, and a well-developed safehouse (“brown aid”) network for fugitive terrorists and assassins. These neo-Nazi fanatics have staged some of the worst outrages in post-war Europe, including the 1980 Bologna train station bombing in Italy, which killed 95 people and injured over 200.

As an undercover informant, Hill helped hide Italian fugitives implicated in the Bologna massacre. He was also drawn into a plot to bomb a West Indian carnival in the mostly black Notting Hill district of London, but the scheme was aborted when *Searchlight* tipped off the police. Nevertheless, the death toll from neo-Nazi violence in Europe exceeds that of the far left. And the violence is sure to continue, as anti-immigrant parties gain at the voting booth throughout Western Europe. Hill's highly readable account sheds significant light on this disturbing development.

Martin A. Lee is the author of *Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD and the Sixties Rebellion*, and editor of *Extra!*, the publication of Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting.

Pricked by Thatcher's thorns



Philip Davis as Cyril with director Mike Leigh on the set of *High Hopes*.

High Hopes
Directed by Mike Leigh

By Pat Aufderheide

THINGS FALL APART. THE CENTER cannot hold, either. And still, in its irritating way, life goes on. Not life as you knew it, perhaps, but culture goes right on permutating.

Thus, we get *High Hopes* amid the shards of Thatcherism. Or perhaps I should say spikes, since cacti are the central metaphor in English film

director Mike Leigh's prickly entry into the bitter-wit-of-the-late-20th century sweepstakes.

High Hopes has an energy and interest that would baffle every teacher of Scriptwriting 101 and every agent pitching a package. And it must have driven to distraction its own promotion people, who are marketing a product (whether or not it wants to be one) on the entertainment machine's assembly line. The movie has a story of sorts, but that's not really the point. Its journey through the windows and into the

homes of the Thatcher era's winners and losers is a probe of a society's soul.

That puts it squarely in a biting, lively collection of recent British films about the quality of life and

FILM

hope under late capitalism. Film-makers, it seems, have taken on the social role of the canary in the coal mine. But unlike, say, Stephen Frears' *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, the director's anger and curiosity are

creative work and research. We go year by year, inventing the history, not the film. Part of the joy in the thing is that they become real people. You went to work every day and wanted to find out what happened to them.

What I did, wearing a writer's and a director's hat simultaneously, is to push and pull and cajole in a direction to that final microcosm from which I can construct the final film. Because I'm obliged to care about every character at the center of his or her universe, and take on every sort of detail about everybody, when I finally stand back it comes ready-made, as it were, with layers and layers.

But listening to this, I would never have imagined the wild clash of performance styles in the film.

Yes, but all that is drawn from real experience. For instance, the couple next door—they are people whose parents have country estates, and who went to English public schools—that couple's style is based on their characters. And the sister: if you tell me you don't know anyone as neurotic as that, I simply don't believe you. Of course, it's possible to achieve a more naturalistic style or mode in the way I work. I am not

Continued on page 21

controlled in *High Hopes*. They are expressed through the development of characters that range from the naturalistic to the burlesque.

Clashing styles: Leigh, a veteran stage and TV director (see accompanying interview) showcases radi-

Former television and stage director Mike Leigh's movie *High Hopes* fits squarely into a biting, lively collection of recent British films about the quality of life and hope under late capitalism.

cally different performance styles, associating them with different values and classes living cheek by jowl in Thatcher's England. Each performance is boosted just slightly past plausibility, so that you never forget you're watching performances. Yet the performances are so well-grounded in subcultural detail and so well-supported by production design that you don't doubt their relation to reality.

Shirl (Ruth Sheen) and Cyril (Philip Davis) are at the center of the film. Cyril is a downwardly mobile veteran of more optimistic days. At 35, he's a motorcycle messenger, delivering communications to a world he refuses to join. Neither he nor the winsome, toothy Shirl has high hopes—except the highest one of all, to find some meaning in life. Shirl thinks they could have a baby, but Cyril can't bear initiating new life when he can't figure out the point of it himself. He explains it to her as they stare at Karl Marx's gravestone, engraved with Marx's maxim that the goal is not to understand the world but to change it. "It's a different world now," Cyril says. "Soon there'll be 26 TV stations blaring out 24 hours a day... It's pissing in the wind."

The global situation isn't what brings Cyril to that conclusion, though, but evidence much closer to home. As he tells Shirl in one of their baby discussions, "Families fuck you up." And there's his family to prove it. His sister Valerie (Heather Tobias), for instance, is a permanently cranked-up hysteric, whose husband, a used-car salesman, is really married to the entrepreneurial ethic. With her gaudy reflective wallpaper, an Exercycle and red sports car, she's a sauntering embodiment of discontent disguised as consumer extravagance. She's the case against kitsch. When Valerie throws a birthday party for her senile mother (Edna Dore), the scene becomes something like a John Waters film as dreamed by Sam Shepard.

The neighbors provide no better example. A young elite couple have moved in next to the mother's council flat, in what could be a demonstration project for Thatcher's privatization schemes. When the old lady locks herself out, we watch the cultures clash. Laetitia (Leslie Manville) is too impatient even to wait for the woman to drag her body up the steps: "Chop, chop!" she cries. She's got an opera to attend, a charity to donate champagne to and no time to waste.

Cool and arch: In this madhouse of decaying lives and hardened hearts, Cyril has the decency to be depressed about what is patently depressing, while Shirl is the movie's earth mother, patient and kind because someone has to be. (Shirl is the one who cultivates the cacti—one named Thatcher—that punctuate her apartment, otherwise a friendly den.) These characters are played by hypernaturalism, understated and cool. The perspective of the film, even when the shots are not taken from their point of view, is theirs.

The worlds they intersect, by contrast, are all archly poised. Edna Dore plays the mother with minimalist frozen despair, and when mother and daughter face off in a birthday battle over eating cake, it's like watching a Beckett play collide with a soap opera. The elite couple's characters are rendered so crisply they crack at the edge of their upper-class accents.

A clash of styles this bold is made possible in part by the high cultural definition of Britain's class system, but it's still a risky ploy. What makes it work is in part the intensity of each performance. What also makes it work is its match with the bizarre fragmentation of English daily life today. Cyril's dismay and Shirl's yearning, their rejection as well as their acceptance, gain plausibility by the revue-sketch quality of the lives around them.

High Hopes, which develops such a somber theme, is full of hilarious moments in the tone of a film by Pedro Almodovar. Many of the moments were spiked with outrage, and some of them are elegant metonyms for absurdity masked as ordinary reality. The film offers an odd but invigorating hope, in Cyril's remark near the film's end: "I'm scared of getting bitter." Maybe that's why Shirl's still with him—because he hasn't yet given in.

In this highly ambitious little film, Mike Leigh has focused on the problem of going on when life seems to have lost its center, when baseness is rewarded but even the rewards don't bring satisfaction, when the experience of daily life is at vast odds with the image factory. He's too smart to deliver answers. Instead his characters deliver the reality that we still have choices to make, and must make them.

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Mike Leigh talks of his *High Hopes*

By Pat Aufderheide

MIKE LEIGH, AFTER TRAINING and experience in the theater, made his first film, *Bleak Moments*, in 1971. Since then he has become well known for his television productions, developed through the unorthodox method of creating characters with actors through improvisation and then writing a script, evolving a fiction style he describes as "a form of social documentary." He spoke with *In These Times* in Washington, D.C.

How have you managed to take a subject and situation that most people would find depressing, and make a film that, without denying a grim reality, is far from depressing?

I don't approach it from the viewpoint of having a problem to illustrate. What I try to do is to create a microcosm. I try to make it as three-dimensional and solid as I can. What I don't do and don't much care for

is to make characters mere ciphers of one notion or another.

Your question is also about the particular preoccupations of the central characters, with which I would sympathize and which are an expression of my concerns. The film

INTERVIEW

works on a number of different levels concurrently. The film is about holding on to their values and sense of humor, with some courage, I think.

The film is inconclusive. There are no easy answers. You have a distinctive working style, improvising with the actors to develop character and only then writing the script.

My improvisational approach goes back to creating that microcosm. Although there is an idea, a conception, I start with an open brief. I won't do a project anyone puts pressure on me to describe. I work individually with each actor to bring a character into existence, through

By Richard Ryan

Wrestling with ideas becomes a philosophical grudge match

IN THE LAST WEEK OF DECEMBER A significant episode in American intellectual history quietly unfolded in the halls and conference rooms of the Sheraton Hotel in the nation's capital. Still, despite the reports of a "new intellectualism" abroad in the land, we can safely presume that the average Washingtonian paid scant attention to the annual meeting of the eastern division of the American Philosophical Association (APA).

Not that it's surprising: for the last 20 years the "analytic Anglo-American" school, the dominant force in U.S. philosophy departments, has narrowed the field to a constricted set of linguistic, logical and scientific questions that seemed to bypass both the grand humanistic tradition of Western philosophy and the ad hoc political crises. While many distinguished analytic philosophers (Hilary Putnam, Noam Chomsky) were personally progressive, the analytic movement itself was disengaged, apolitical and aloof. If you weren't an academic philosopher the field offered you no "tools for living."

Pragmatist perestroika: But in the '80s a transformation has come over the sundry historians, logicians, linguists, et al. who call themselves philosophers. The theorists now entering the field have balked at the discipline's self-imposed limitations. And many prominent veterans of the analytic school have turned their backs on former doctrines, denounced theories they themselves formulated and leaped into the fracas as American philosophy re-invents and re-discovers itself. Re-invents itself by submitting to the powerful mutating radiation of literary and social theory: post-structuralism, deconstruction, neo-Marxism, feminist and minority criticism. Re-discovers itself by acknowledging (as used to be widely known) that some of the most radical and original Western thinkers since the death of Kant came out of the American pragmatist school: Peirce, Dewey and James foremost among them.

The effects of this intellectual upheaval were visible throughout the December meeting of the APA, and most apparent in diversity of tendencies on parade. There were plenty of traditional workshops to attend ("Aristotle's Treatment of Megalopsychia"; "Foundationalism and Regress Arguments") but connoisseurs could also sample the more *nouvelle* dishes: "The Taoist Legacy to the New World Religious Consciousness" "Lacan's Hamlet: Mourning, Woman and the Phallus"; "The Role of Seeing in Lynch's *Blue Velvet*."

Affinity groups included such as the International Philosophers for the Prevention of Nuclear Omnicide, the King-Gandhi Society and the Sartre Circle. Animal rights were de-

bated; *perestroika* was cross-examined; Husserl, Heidegger and Foucault showed up at dozens of trendy seances. One indication of the field's new secular spirit: *In These Times* and other progressive news outlets were alternately praised and attacked at a workshop on "Philosophy and the Media."

Rigor, or rigor mortis? This explosion of philosophic pluralism, as the movement is being called, comes only after years in which metaphysical, social and aesthetic concerns were suppressed in the name of analytic "rigor." As described by Haverford College's Richard Bernstein (the APA's Eastern president for 1988), the eclipse of so-called continental philosophy began just after World War II, "when what was going on in European philosophy [phenomenology; existentialism; hermeneutics] was taken to be pretentious, obscure, woolly and muddled." Anglo-American philosophers, citing the twin disasters of fascism and

philosophers heavily indebted to their romantic forerunners. But with the advent of computers and the seeming triumph of techno-capitalism, the hold of logic and scientific method on philosophy seemed secure. Pockets of resistance survived among theologians, Marxists and existential psychologists but, by and large, analytics reigned.

As Bernstein noted in the convention's presidential address, the reign was not entirely peaceful. Paradoxes and inconsistencies constantly undermined analytic systems, and as time passed scientific approaches appeared unequal to resolving traditional philosophical concerns. But not until the importation of avant-garde French criticism 10 years ago did philosophy begin to reach out to disciplines beyond the sciences—and especially to literary criticism—for support.

Contours of a renaissance: At the same time, many disenchanted analytic philosophers were re-reading the American pragmatists and discovering connections between the skeptical, evolutionary theories of Peirce and Dewey and the radical critics of the French school. The analytic foundations trembled, and suddenly everyone was "under erasure." Richard Rorty, a philosopher of language, became the high priest of neo-liberalism. Hilary Putnam, a distinguished philosopher of mathematics, started talking mystical metaphysics. Arthur Danto, an analytic historian of ideas, became the

art critic for *The Nation*. The presence of these famous converts at December's APA convention underlined the gathering's acknowledged leitmotifs of renaissance and renewal.

The contours of this history were traced in Bernstein's talk, "Pragmatism, Pluralism and the Healing of Wounds." Bernstein reminded his listeners of the golden age of Amer-

The conference revived a vision of the humanities as a relevant spectator sport.

ican philosophers, when the pragmatists were less interested in scientific certainty than in forming a critical community where ideas could be tested by consensus and democratic investigation. Saying that there was no reason for thinkers to give up their differences, Bernstein still urged them to "displace ideological labeling with reasonable philosophical engagement."

In the face of academics' mutual distrust, this call for intellectual tolerance was not entirely well-received. The associate editor of the *Journal of American Philosophy* and a supporter of the continental position remarked: "I doubt there will be any 'healing of wounds.' The divisions are much too deep to be overcome." Naturally, the hundreds of philosophers trained as analytics are going to be reluctant to give up their turf.

Regardless of whether the continental, pragmatic and pluralist doctrines thrive, the old school will have sheer numbers on its side. The fact is that many major philosophy departments remain firmly in analytic control, ignoring the renaissance of classical American philosophy, let alone the strange offerings of continental theory.

And even if the new wave succeeds there is a second and inevitable obstacle to Bernstein's goal of intellectual unity: the very real possibility that as the analytic continental split is overcome, the surviving "pluralist" school will rupture into a contest as belligerent as the current dispute.

Jacques around the clock: This possibility was foretold on the final day of the conference, an occasion of high intellectual drama, as the great French critic Jacques Derrida, the founder of the fearsome theory of "deconstruction," faced off against Thomas McCarthy, an ascen-

dant scholar from Northwestern who is one of this country's leading exponents of "critical theory," the program of leftist neo-rationalism associated with the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas.

Derrida, once a *bête noir* in American philosophical circles, is now, it seems, a distinguished presence, invited to address the APA convention by the organization's president. As though sensing the opportunity to win fresh intellectual converts, Derrida performed brilliantly even by his high standards: his talk, a long discourse on the nature of friendship and democracy, featured all the signature jokes, diversions and intellectual hand grenades that have made deconstruction so notable.

Derrida argued that our Western view of friendship is grounded in a tradition of "virile homosexuality" that precluded the possibility of friendship between men and women, women and women, natives and foreigners, or even a kind of "pre-Greco," "pre-Judeo-Christian" friendship between humanity and nature. He then called for a new form of friendship that would launch a previously unknown form of democracy, "a democracy that is yet to come."

McCarthy's sharp and straightforward commentary nicely set off Derrida's baroque musing. McCarthy, in a series of common sense objections, noted that Derrida's prescribed "total transformation" of traditional democracy "seems to float the politics of deconstruction into uncharted waters without any compass." McCarthy said he felt it was fair to ask Derrida to be more specific: "What sorts of social, political, legal and economic institutions does he see superseding those we have experienced?"

City Paper, D.C.'s hip local weekly, ran a blunter review of the Derrida concert: "Deconstruction is really a post-modern version of irony. And when you've got that rhythm, you can't dance politically." And a few days earlier, neo-liberal celebrity Richard Rorty, in a workshop on pragmatism and education, dismissed deconstruction as a fairly predictable form of romantic skepticism with no significant political applications.

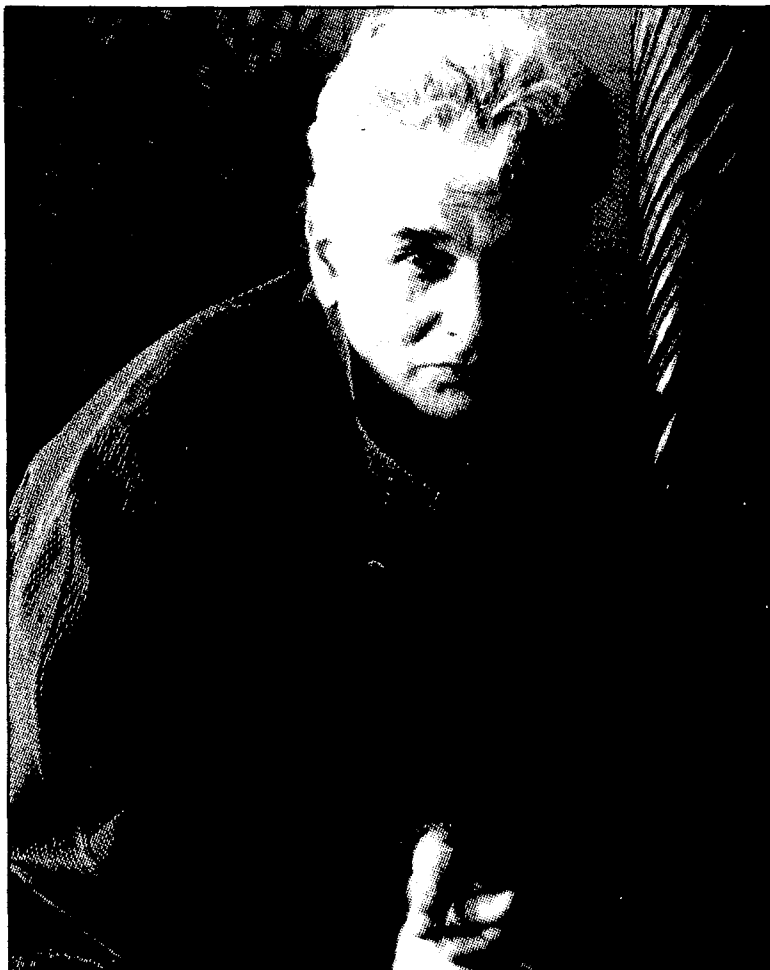
Such complaints suggest that a possible liberal/leftist assault on deconstruction is brewing, to the benefit of the analytic status quo. That would be a pity, after the communal success of the December APA convention, which many participants agreed was the most diverse and energetic meeting the association has held in years. At very least it revived a vision of the humanities as relevant and unpredictable, a spectator sport. Especially when literary critics show up at philosophy conferences and get attacked for not being political enough. ■

Richard Ryan writes frequently for *In These Times*.

PHILOSOPHY

communism—which were often seen as outgrowths of romantic German philosophers such as Hegel and Nietzsche—fought for a program that would purify philosophy of mystical or irrational elements.

There was something overhasty in all this, since many of the progenitors of the analytic movement—Frege, Wittgenstein and Gödel, for instance—were German-speaking



Jacques Derrida: frolicking amid the rubble of the deconstruction zone.

By Tom Engelhardt

Tax alternatives: fee to choose

WHILE THE USER-FEE CONCEPT floated as one solution to the Savings and Loan (S&L) crisis is officially dead, financial Washington is abuzz with rumors about future forms of "revenue enhancement," not to speak of jokes on the subject. ("Will the enhancees get screwed? Read my hips," being perhaps the mildest.) Washington insiders are still arguing over whether the user-fee firestorm was a debacle for which Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady was responsible, a premature leak from enemy enhancers in Congress, or a premeditated smokescreen for a more complex S&L plan meant to squeeze the taxpayer dry. Whatever the case, this reporter has learned that it was just the visible edge of a vast substratum of planning for a revenue-enhanced budgetary future.

Of course, the user-fee and the concept behind it—that people who benefit from a service or facility should pay for it—is a commonplace, as anyone who has gotten their driver's license or paid their way into a national park knows. (In fact, according to economist Barry Levine's well-respected text, *User Fees and Public Finance*, the concept, though obviously not the term, goes back to the dawn of history. The first user-fee, Levine claims, was instituted by Pharoah Nomentheps II for entry to his father's tomb, revenues being applied not just to dry-rot maintenance, but to financing a war against the Hittites.) Behind the recent user-fee flap, however, lurk some genuinely new developments.

Treasury Secretary Brady, in a "computer-only (no backup)" memorandum dated Feb. 2, 1989, has called on every cabinet-level officer and agency head to produce original approaches to the raising of more funds. These funds, he suggests, should not be viewed as taxes, but as "investments" by the American people in their own future. From the



Treasury Department comes an idea for a series of "fun fees," billed as a way for Americans to "please" their society. Typical of such fees is one aimed at American eaters flocking to restaurants in ever-increasing numbers and affectionately dubbed the "read my tips" proposal. Another, the "read my dips" plan, focuses solely on grazing bars, now a Washington craze.

What's the use? The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) proposes that consumers of new technology become "investors" in America's R&D future by paying "holograph-fees" on everything from the office Fax machine to your garden variety VCR. FCC planners suggest that in return for these holograph-fees, "shares in America's techno-future" should be paid out to each "contributor" in the form of little muppet-like figures that would double as children's toys (a publicity plus for an administration bent on emphasizing family values).

The most inventive user-fee proposed so far is one from unnamed Pentagon officials that is being billed as "the first non-user fee in history."

Defense Department officials are already privately hailing it as potentially "the greatest insurance policy ever conceived for the health and safety of the American people" and the "most significant proposal for

FINANCE

peace in our time by our new Peace President." The idea is to charge a sum prorated by family size to every citizen based on the number of major weapons *not* used in any year. Considering that the American nuclear arsenal alone includes more than 2,000 missiles, potential revenues could run into the multibillions. Funneled directly into a Pentagon "No-Use Development Trust Fund," these monies would allow the Bush administration to announce sizeable cutbacks in the military budget without actually lowering it in any way.

Perhaps the most interesting of this week's batch of leaked documents is one from Richard Darman, the savvy new budget director. Darman argues privately that the term "user fee" should be "retired," imply-

ing as it does a private levy, rather than a public offering to the well-being of the nation. What he suggests is that the administration adopt a new term—the *Xat* (pronounced *Zhat*)—for its various funding ideas.

The latest revenue wrinkle in China's new privatizing economy, the *Xat* is the Beijing government's way of skimming funds from China's ongoing craze for glitzy Japanese and Western consumer products. In return for a "patriotic voluntary contribution" or *Xat*, over and above normal fees and taxes, any business can now sell a homegrown product with a government-provided "foreign" cachet. (The term *Xat* itself was originally the name for a complex cooking process that translates roughly as "peeling the skin off a pressed duck.")

In the margin of the copy of the Darman report are the scrawled initials of Treasury Secretary Brady and a handwritten note that reads: "It's about time the American people paid for their government! And if we can't tax them, at least let's *Xat* them."

Behind these plans for the *xat*-ing of America lies an administration initiative so touchy even the Reaganauts at the height of their power shied away from proposing it. It may, in fact, be the most closely guarded financial secret of our era. This reporter has now confirmed that Nicholas Brady has organized a top-secret task force of five young analysts at Treasury known as "The Young Perks" for their fast-lane lifestyle. Their mission is to prepare a plan for the deregulation and privatization of the Internal Revenue Service.

All the Young Perks: According to one of the five, who agreed to be interviewed on a not-for-attribution basis, "Back in the early '80s they just deregulated the wrong businesses when they let the S&Ls loose. Now, to save them, we've got to do the same for the IRS! You should see the figures! Billions and billions in uncollected taxes. I guarantee you, even though the shit'll hit the fan, the idea *will* fly. After all, deregulation worked for the mail, right? Have we ever had more ways to spend money just to get a letter delivered on time?"

Although several plans are being considered, according to our Young Perk, the most likely one is modeled on the French tax-collecting system of several centuries ago. "Look," our informant says, "it was a successfully privatized system that kept those kings in strawberries, whoever the hell was on the throne. Hardly a complaint right up to the revolution, and how many hundreds of years of financing was that, for God's sake?"

"By the way," he added, shuffling papers into a briefcase in preparation for a dash to a private jet and a night on the town in New York, "you publish my name or break this story before 1991, and I suggest you mail your accountant in with your taxes, if you catch my drift." ■

Tom Engelhardt is a senior editor at Pantheon Books. © 1989 Tom Engelhardt

Leigh

Continued from page 19

concerned with naturalism. I'm concerned with realism, a heightened realism. What I'm concerned to do, irrespective of style, is to aspire to the condition of extant reality.

What has the reception to the film been like?

There has been less resistance to it in the States than in England, partly, I suppose, because it's misunderstood here. A reviewer for one trendy magazine in England said that it was the "most tedious experience," spending time with "people I spend my life trying to get away from." That was more revealing of the reviewer than the film. And there has been political resistance, for instance, the charge that I show no sympathy for the neighbors—this primarily from people who most closely resemble the neighbors. But it just opened in London, and in its first week it was No. 7 on the top 10 of box office.

In my own defense I should say that in the popular audience, the non-media, non-arty and certainly among working-class audiences, my films have been very popular, mostly through television. I've done a set of films mostly for the BBC, all on the same model, shot in 16mm, which do not differ from films except that they were made for TV on a lower budget. The Museum of Modern Art now wants to have a retrospective, if they can get them out of the BBC.

Was the film financed through any government subsidies?

A couple of years ago the Thatcher government abolished the National Film Finance Corporation, which had levied a tax on all box office of features. It was replaced with the British Film Finance Consortium, which is not a state body but raises private capital. It so happens that it is run by a very enlightened guy, who manages to run it the way a state-financed outfit should be run, with the money going to committed films of

some kind. Most of my money, however, came from Channel 4.

One of the reasons I haven't found it easy to work in films over the years is my method, not having a script. But in fact none of us for a long time was able to make movies in Britain, until Channel 4 [which began broadcasting in November 1982]. We worked in TV and mostly for the BBC, which used to be (and no longer is) an extremely creative and liberal organization.

The TV world in Britain is indeed changing dramatically. Channel 4 appears to be heading toward less "risky" ventures, and a recent white paper indicates that British television will be heading more toward a U.S. model. How will this affect you and other "committed" filmmakers?

My own feeling is that in the long run the proliferation of commercial cable and satellite channels, this voracious need to fill the air-waves, will make it more difficult for serious

work to get on.

At the moment we have four channels in the U.K. I think it's healthy to have four and not, say, 50. Apart from the fact that I think there's more in people's lives than watching TV, it informs what people watch with some kind of resonance and meaning. With 50 channels, it's like a room with so much food you can't decide what to eat.

One has to be careful in this argument. One is not talking about not having too many ideas. But the audience's relationship with a play or a film or a football game is more a true relationship when the number of relationships available is contained, limited to a smaller number. The knowledge that one of my TV films is one of, say, three things anyone could be watching meant one had a sense of the potential of actually discussing something with the audience.

TV isn't like the cinema. In the

cinema you can sit with other people and experience something together. The sheer fact of being able to laugh together is important. TV doesn't work like that. But to be able to talk about it the next day, to have a discussion, that is what I'm most interested in.

Which brings us to the question, why is it so important for you to work in the cinema, when you have been so successful in television?

It's to do with this argument, I suppose. When I grew up in the '40s and '50s, going to the pictures was something you did several times a week, at the local cinema in Manchester. It was very important. It remains important. There's nothing better. Apart from all the other things, it was going into a place designed for you to concentrate. That's very important in this distracted age. I feel more and more urgent about it. ■

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Iran

Continued from page 10

icy since Iran's 1979 revolution. European diplomats were recalled from Iran and economic cooperation was put on hold, including some \$3 billion to \$4 billion in credits for projects that Iran's oil minister had described as an "absolute priority."

At the same time, President George Bush didn't comment on Khomeini's threat for a week, and then sympathized with those who found *The Satanic Verses* offensive, while tepidly criticizing Khomeini's behavior. Since then Western leaders from former President Jimmy Carter to Britain's foreign secretary have condemned the book. These conciliatory statements are aimed at offering Iran a face-saving way out of the crisis and

underscore the ties that exist between Iran and the West (as well as support for religious fundamentalism, which many Western leaders have found quite useful). And they also reflect a fear that the Soviet Union may increase its influence in Iran as a result of the Rushdie furor. The Soviets' refusal to criticize Khomeini was condemned by the State Department as contrary to *glasnost* and an effort to delay Iran's "inevitable rapprochement with the West."

The Gulf War and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan both have ended; but the fact that an international furor could erupt over the publication of one book illustrates the deep tensions—both East-West and North-South—that continue to grip Southwest Asia.

Larry Everest writes regularly on the Mideast.

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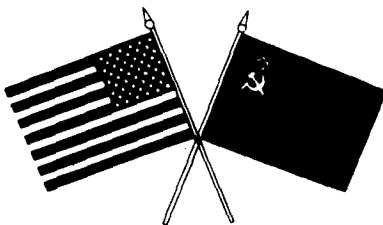
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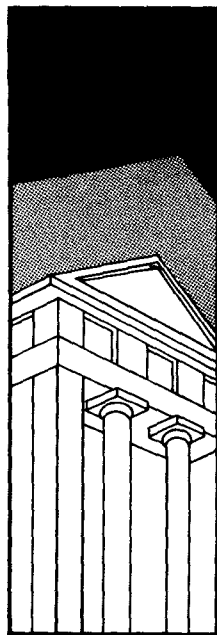
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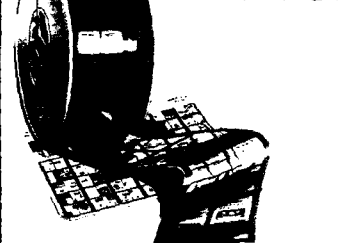
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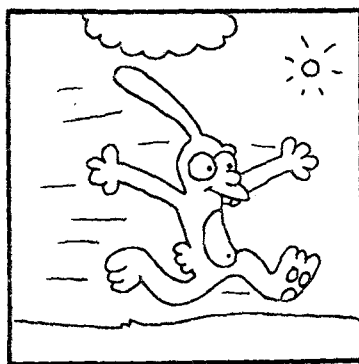
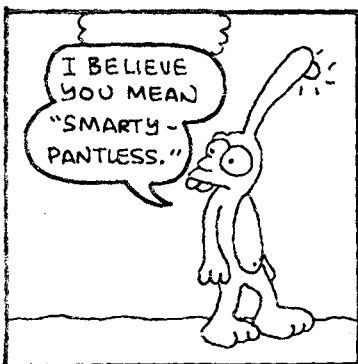
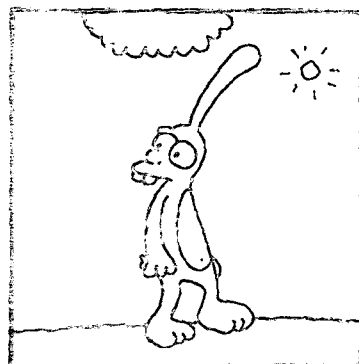
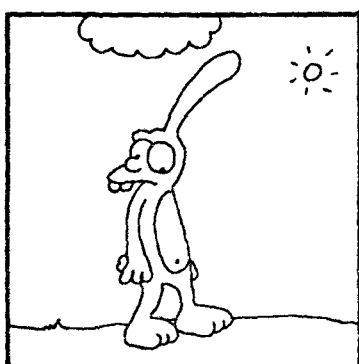
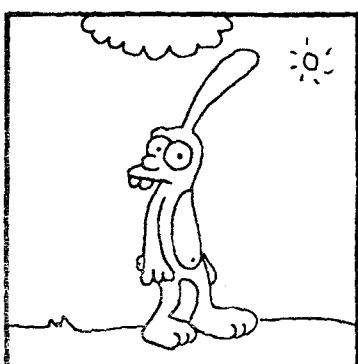
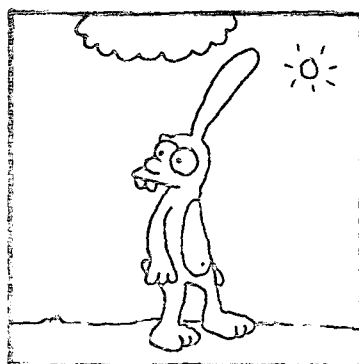
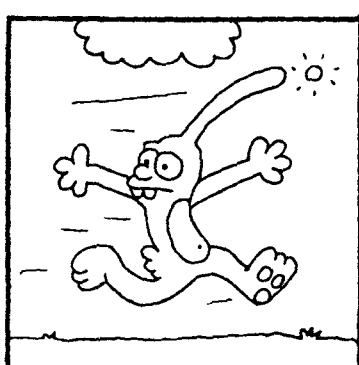
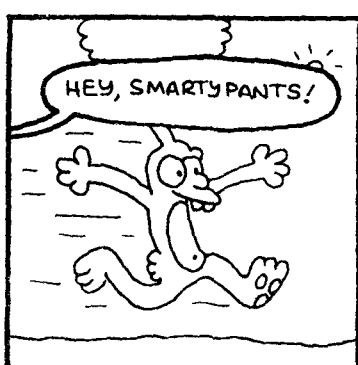
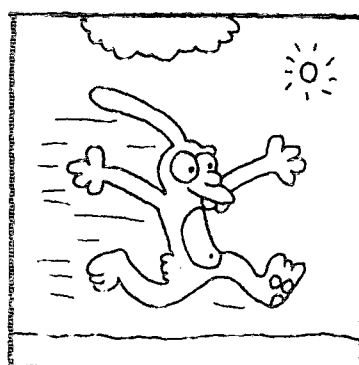
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6066 FEATURES SYNDICATE 7-31-87

the MALIGN coMedy

By Chris Rohmann

IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT A piece of real-life theater as rich in fantasy and intrigue as the Iran-contra hearings would find its way onto the legitimate stage. The investigation had a colorful supporting cast full of self-serving buffoons with leaky memories, and was a starring vehicle for Oliver North, the man who made lying under oath a patriotic act.

Larry Gelbart, who created the TV series *M*A*S*H* and wrote the musical *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and the film *Tootsie*, was quick to recognize the scandal's farcical possibilities. *Mastergate*, his Iran-contra parody, is currently receiving its world-premiere production at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Mass.

High-concept, low-life: With the North trial finally underway, the timing couldn't be better for a larger-than-life replay of the hearings that transfixed the nation during the summer of 1987. Gelbart's wicked wit is right on target, but when it comes to incredible situations and ludicrous shenanigans he has a hard time topping the genuine article. The play is funnier than the original, but that's partly because it's much less disturbing.

Mastergate is a surprisingly close paraphrase of the Iran-contra hearings, with a weapons-diversion scandal at its center and transparent stand-ins for most of the principals. Gelbart's twist is the addition of a Hollywood connection to the scam, in which Tinseltown's penchant for rewriting history to fit the story meshes neatly with the surreal plots of Washington's leading actors.

It seems that a Hollywood studio, Master Pictures, has been seized by the government to recoup back taxes owed by its fugitive billionaire owner. In production at the time of the takeover was *Tet—The Movie*, a revisionist Vietnam epic in the Rambo tradition with a CIA-commissioned script. As the testimony unfolds, it appears that the film, shooting its Vietnam locations in Central America, was used as a covert arms-supply conduit to right-wing counterrevolutionaries.

The semi-fictitious geography of the region bears a fuzzy resemblance to reality, much like the Iran-contra conspirators' understanding of Central American politics. The rebels, called *Los Otros—The Others*—are camped in the jungle of San Elvador, trying to overthrow the leftist government of Ambigua, whose leader is



Daniel Van Bergen as Maj. Manley Battle.

named Daniel Overtaga. There is also a South American connection involving Carlos Mendacio, the cocaine kingpin of Oblivia.

Negate gate: The action covers one day of the hearings, held, as the committee chairman says, "to try to get all the facts together in one place and see if they recognize each other." In a windy preamble, the chairman—a flinty Southerner in the mold of Watergate Committee Chairman Sam Ervin—announces that the hearings are "intended to give every appearance of being bipartisan" and warns that "those who forget the past are sure to be subpoenaed."

The committee members sit at two high tables, looking down on the witnesses and the press corps—in this context, an appropriately symbolic position. Behind the witness table is a large, reproachful mural of the First Continental Congress. The press section is occupied by store-window mannequins and surprised audience members who thought they had reserved ordinary seats. TV monitors overhead carry live closeups of the proceedings and the inane commentary of sleek network newswoman Merry Chase (Cherry Jones).

One by one the witnesses, all fluent in doublespeak—"My involvement was limited to only the extent of my participation"—give their well-coached testimony on meetings they didn't attend and conversations they vaguely recall not having. Each has a lawyer at his elbow and a wife at his side (two actors play all the lawyers and all the wives).

There's an IRS functionary who affirms his duty as a witness to be "steadfastly evasive and selectively helpful." There's the secretary of state, admitting that he spoke out forcefully against the diversion plan but just as energetically worked to implement it.

Ollie, Ollie, in free: And of course there is the star witness, Maj. Manley Battle (Daniel Van Bergen), his chest thick with medals, his wife seated faithfully behind him knitting an American flag. As charming, resolute and deceptively forthright as Ollie himself, Maj. Battle says, "I prefer calling a spade by its codeword." In response to the Big Question, he replies, "I was told the president didn't know by the same people who told him he didn't know." And when he lectures the committee on patriotism, the major's "gung-holier than thou" attitude prompts the chairman's admonition, "We are not here to hurl bumper stickers at each other."

There is also an appearance by the vice president (Joseph Daly in a classy impersonation of a preppy, bespectacled George Bush). In a speech that recalls one of Bush's more celebrated campaign gaffes, he roundly defends Maj. Battle, saying, "Nobody asked him about accountability when he was crawling on his belly through the mud to attack Pearl Harbor." And he glorifies America as "the only country where a man can vindicate himself by saying whatever it is he thinks the people want to hear."

The unseen presence at the hearings is the late CIA director, Wylie Slaughter, whom one witness praises for "his lifetime dedication to impose democracy on helpless people everywhere." A witness describes deathbed meetings in which the director masterminded the diversion operation while being fed intelligence intravenously. And even though his body was shredded after death, he has remained in command via videotapes and holograms.

There are a lot of Reagan jokes, too, most of them about napping, but they seem dated. In fact, the play's topicality eventually works against it. The *Mastergate* scandal is no more surprising, grotesque or treasonous than its model. In the end, the playwright settles for burlesque rather than satire, and *Mastergate* never quite ascends from the ridiculous to the sublime.

Chris Rohmann is a Massachusetts writer.

Larry Gelbart's *Mastergate* knocks 'em dead.